CBW

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For PCV Professionals

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Getting it Right

I was interested in the story on page 7 about Megabus's problems with its American West Coast operations. Particularly in the comment by Dale Moser, president of Megabus.com, that, faced with low ridership on his prestigious LA to Las Vegas and San Francisco routes, "Maybe, truth be told, we are just unable to get them out of their cars."

In a former life I used to attend trade shows in Los Angeles and Las Vegas each year, and drove between the two cities a number of times. If ever a route would be well-served by an intercity coach, then that's it. Miles and miles of desert driving, with speed controlled by Nevada state troopers in helicopters. It was dull in the extreme. Perfect, you would think, for a comfortable, cheap coach trip. Particularly to take the gambling hordes from Hollywood to the fleshpots of Vegas. But no it seems.

I was struck once again, that, for some people at least, there remains a very real barrier to bus and coach usage. Some two and half years into this job I still meet up regularly with friends who, knowing what I do for a living, delight in telling me they still haven't travelled by bus since school days and won't be anytime soon. It was a thought echoed last week when interviewing Darwen Group's Andrew Brian, when he used the example of a bus's interior being attractive enough to persuade his wife out of her car, to illustrate a point about bus design.

There are undoubtedly a wealth of reasons to push more and more people onto public transport, rising fuel prices and congestion being simply two that are currently much publicised.

However, the industry mustn't lose sight of the fact that, as it seeks out new customers, perhaps from groups who would traditionally have simply not considered bus or coach travel, expectations of service and environment will constantly rise. There's no point ignoring the fact that there remain too many examples of bad practice, bad design and bad service around the industry. Only a couple of weeks ago I caught a bus in the East End of London, operated by a major plc, with a laughably bad interior, complete with advertising stickers stuck at bizarre angles across the side panels, arriving 22 minutes after the longest advertised time gap between services. Wondering if something was wrong, and with no RTI at the stop, I tried the helpline, via my mobile, advertised on the stop, only to give up after the endless recital of recorded messages. I'll stick with it. But I know a lot of people who would have jumped in a taxi and given up on buses for another decade or so...

Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

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Briefly

Two new deputy traffic commissioners have been appointed to take up posts in the Eastern Traffic Area. The two new deputies are Marcia Davis and Gillian Elkins. Marcia Davis, a barrister, is Deputy Clerk to the Justices at Milton Keynes Magistrates' Court. Solicitor Gillian Ekins was previously a partner in private practice, but now works as a consultant. She sits as a Parking Adjudicator and a Road User Charging Adjudicator.

Fares on Harrogate & District Travel routes went up from Sunday by an average of 10%, although some were frozen and others jumped by up to 25%. A company spokesman said: "During the last 12 months the whole country has experienced an unprecedented increase in the cost of fuel. This increase is designed to offset some of these additional fuel costs." He said costs to the business were currently 50% higher than they were 12 months ago and there was no sign that they would ease in the short to medium term. "We have waited for as long as we could before taking this decision," he said.

AC Williams, an operator in Ancaster, was targeted by thieves last week causing £8,000 worth of damage. Among the items stolen were four 15ins flat-screen monitors, a DVD player, a Sony stereo, car radios and a set of Slazenger golf clubs. Four cars, one van and several buses were damaged, including a double decker which had a fire extinguisher thrown through a side window. Transport manager Ian Mansell said: "It's caused us problems because we can't use the double decker and we're having to wait for parts for it. It's a pain because we're having to send out two buses instead of one. They went through every vehicle in the yard. Some staff are away on tours so they'd left their cars here overnight."

Sponsor offers cash prize for UKBA award

Centrebus to supply 'substantial' sum of money for 2008's new Young Manager Award

The search is on to find Britain's top bus industry manager under the age of 35, and a substantial cash prize awaits the winner.

The new UK Bus Awards Young Manager Award was launched in March by Transport Minister Rosie Winterton.

The competition and the cash prize are designed to help to foster and encourage managers who are under 35 and who work in bus companies, PTEs, local authorities and Transport for London. The award is being sponsored by independent operator Centrebus, who will also supply the cash prize.

UKBA Chairman John Owen welcomed the idea of the prize as an added incentive for potential award winners. "In order to prosper in the future, the industry must maximize the potential of its young managers," he said. "We shall need their abilities, hard work and dedication in order to deliver a successful, growing industry in future."

He added that it was in everybody's interests -- staff, passengers and stakeholders - to help young people in the industry to develop the skills and release their potential.

■ Further details of the Young Manager category can be found on the UKBA web site at *www.ukbusawards.co.uk*. Nominations for this category, along with all the other awards, close on Friday June 13.

PTEG urges cities to follow London's lead

According to a new analysis by leading bus industry expert, Professor Peter White of the University of Westminster, making bus networks simple, frequent and stable every day could help trigger a revival in city region bus networks.

The paper (which can be downloaded at *http://www.pteg.net/PolicyCentre/Bus/WhiteReport.htm*) takes an in-depth look at why more passengers are using buses in London while fewer people are taking the bus in the next tier of major cities.

Contrary to received opinion these new findings show that the fastest growth in bus use in London is in off-peak periods, and mostly outside the central area congestion zone. It suggests that the easy to use, easy to understand and comprehensive service that all parts of London now enjoy, is helping to drive growth in a way that could be replicated in Britain's other major cities.

Neil Scales, Chair of pteg, said: "This report provides policy makers with some valuable insights into the scale of the improved bus 'offer' that will be needed if city region bus networks can be turned around."

In PTE areas the 8.6% decline in bus patronage in eight years is actually less than would be expected given that nearly 12% of bus mileage has disappeared, and revenue per passenger has been driven up by nearly 20% in real terms.

The report argues that it would be 'naïve' to believe that all the factors behind the recent growth in bus use in London could be easily replicated elsewhere, but adds: "It is noteworthy that some of the more progressive companies in the deregulated regions also display similar features, such as the flat fares in Brighton & Hove, and reintroduction of commercially-registered evening and Sunday services by operators such as Trent Barton and Harrogate & District."

Vale Coaches' Solos have been returned

Manchester's Vale Coaches sells up

One of Manchester's smallest independent operators has thrown in all its tendered services and is selling up, after finding costs of operations too high. Vales Coaches operated eight tendered services and two commercial services which were scheduled for withdrawal, not to be replaced.

Started around 20 years ago by Peter Green, Vales initially operated full size buses and coaches in the competitive maelstrom of Manchester, but settled down to operating minibuses on tendered services. Six low floor Solos have been returned off rental, but the company is now planning to sell its seven Mercedes-Benz 814 Varios and two 709s.

Greater Manchester PTE was informed on Friday that the company would not be continuing, and has replaced all eight services with emergency contracts. A spokesman for the company told *CBW* that operating local services was now costing too much.

Boris announces new transport director

Boris Johnson has announced the appointment of Kulveer Ranger as his new director for transport policy. Mr Ranger was the lead delivery manager of the Oystercard for London in 2003 and led commercial negotiations on behalf of the Secretary of State supporting the King's Cross redevelopment.

Mr Ranger will lead on policy direction for Transport on behalf of the Mayor. He will also oversee the relationship between the Greater London Authority and Transport for London to ensure the delivery of the Mayor's priorities.

Kulveer Ranger will be one of the ten Mayoral Appointments. Commenting on the appointment Boris Johnson said: "I am delighted to be able to announce Kulveer as my director for transport policy. He has vast experience in delivering large projects with multiple stakeholders in both the public and private sector, and has a reputation as a terrific motivator and a leader with ceaseless energy.

"I am certain that Kulveer will be able to use his experience in delivering the Oystercard in London to help me to deliver my key transport commitments including implementing interactive bus tracking, re-phasing London's traffic lights and coordinating a closer relationship between TfL and the private train companies which currently serve London's suburbs."

Takeover complete as Stagecoach ties up acquisitions

Stagecoach buys Rapsons

As reported in *CBW* two weeks ago, Stagecoach announced on Friday that it has acquired Rapsons.

A statement said: "Stagecoach is pleased to announce that on 16 May 2008 it completed the acquisition of Highland Country Buses and Orkney Coaches from Rapsons Coaches.

"The business acquired, which operates bus and coach services in the Highlands, Skye and Orkney, has an annual turnover of approximately £12.5m, employs around 400 people and runs a fleet of around 200 vehicles. The purchase includes bus depots in Inverness, Aviemore, Fort William, Portree, Thurso, Wick and Orkney."

Robert Andrew, regional director for Stagecoach Scotland, said: "We are delighted to have completed this acquisition, which will complement our existing high-quality bus operations in the North of Scotland.

"We already have one of the youngest bus fleets in Scotland, with high levels of customer satisfaction and a strong track-record of investment, and we look forward to improving services to customers in the months ahead. The newly-acquired services will be operated under the Stagecoach brand and we would like to welcome our new employees to the company."

BAA to increase Heathrow coach pick up charges

CPT director of communications, John Major has written to members informing them that BAA will be increasing their coach pick up charges at Heathrow from Sunday 1 June, from £21.15 to £24.80.

In the special Newsmail, John says: "We have been in formal discussions with BAA on this issue since the early part of the year when CPT were first advised of the Authority's plans to increase the charge to £26.80. We had negotiated this figure down to the proposed £24.80 but they confirmed today that they had set June 1 as the date the new price would be introduced.

"BAA advised us that the extremely short notice of this change that they have given was unavoidable.

"I made plain to them how difficult it is for the industry to manage a change such as this and called for an urgent meeting with Heathrow's commercial transport management to discuss it. This request has been agreed to. I will keep members informed."

Heathrow services face rising costs

Focus Coaches boss faces conduct hearing

Darren Critchley, whose company Focus Coaches of Much Hoole, Lancashire crashed in November last year (*CBW* November 28), survived a two-pronged public inquiry, last week, but still has to face a driver conduct hearing on Friday.

Both Mr Critchley, and his former company Focus Coaches were called to a public inquiry in front of North Western traffic commissioner Beverley Bell, but the inquiry heard that both licences fell, as soon as the company went into voluntary liquidation, and Mr Critchley was declared bankrupt, owing £157,000.

Speaking on behalf of Mr Critchley, Andrew Woolfall said that Mr Critchley had given personal guarantees - leading him to be declared bankrupt in April. He said that there was little likelihood of him applying for a new operators licence. "He has lost an excessive amount of his own personal money, well in excess of six figures, and would not necessarily wish to start up again," he said.

Mrs Bell said that both licences were effectively at an end, but there was a concern that she had not been notified of all the changes. "The (Leeds) office is several weeks behind on matters relating to terminations," she said. The traffic commissioner asked whether Mr Critchley was working for any operator and was told that he did undertake some work for Redline Coaches of Preston.

Mrs Bell said that his PCV driving licence was "up for grabs" and after discussions in camera, decided to re-interview Mr Critchley at a driver conduct hearing this week.

Focus Coaches went out of business last November

Obituary

Adrian Johns, formerly sales manager with Alec Head Coaches, passed away peacefully on Thursday 15 May, 2008 at Kettering General Hospital, after a short illness. He was 63 years old. Adrian was known for many years in the coaching industry as having a very dry sense of humour. He leaves his wife Sandra, son and daughter Matthew (16) and Megan (15). His funeral Service will be held at St. Peters Church, Lutton Peterborough on Friday 30 May, 2008 at 12 noon. Flowers or donations can be made to Cancer Research UK. The family requests that all further enquiries are made to Crowsons Funeral Directors, Barnwell, Near Oundle, Peterborough on 01832 272269.

Briefly

Eleven people were injured last Saturday morning when a double-decker bus collided with a car in Derby. Police were called to the incident in Sinfin Lane in at about 10.30am where an Arriva bus had collided with a Mitsubishi Shogun. Eleven people were taken to the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary with minor injuries.

An arsenal of weapons including knives, a baseball bat and screwdrivers were found when police searched a teenage gang on a bus in south-east London. Officers became suspicious when they saw a large number of youths boarding a bus in Evelyn Street, Deptford, on Saturday night, and called for back-up. The youths were locked inside and when searched, 16 weapons were found.

A fire which engulfed a double decker bus in Harrow, north London could have been started deliberately. Police are investigating the blaze, which happened on an H12 bus as it was travelling along Alexandra Avenue, and are initially calling it an arson attack. Passengers were forced to evacuate the bus, as fire took over the top deck on Sunday afternoon.

Two bus drivers who were worried badly behaved children were endangering passenger safety, are up for a national award for their efforts to solve the problem. First Eastern Counties drivers Teresa Lamb and Dave Hawkins decided to start visiting schools to spread the safety message to youngsters and have turned around teenagers' behaviour. The couple came up with the idea of visiting schools to explain the dangers which messing about on buses can cause and have now been nominated for a National Transport Award. Peter Iddon, managing director of First EC, said: "This is a unique and amazing achievement."

First in Leeds moves to new £10m home

After more than 100 years of service, Kirkstall Rd closes

Over a hundred years of history came to an end this week as First closed its Kirkstall Road garage and headquarters in Leeds and moved operations to a new £10million site. The former tram shed at Kirkstall, where trams were also built, was opened in 1897 costing £45,000. The new facility in Hunslet (next door to the site of a former Leeds City Transport tram shed) is a 77,300ft² garage and office complex and will give First capacity and space to stable an extra 30 buses over the next year.

The extra buses, planned for 2008/09, will bring First's fleet in Leeds up to 480 buses and allow it to run more bus services in the city. The location of the new depot near to the new East Leeds Link Road, was chosen by First because it allows a move away from the heavily congested Kirkstall Road area. Over 150 vehicles and 550 staff have relocated.

The extra buses will be purchased and put into operation throughout 2008/09 as part of First's £14million investment programme in a total of 95 new vehicles in Leeds. This means that, along with the £10m spent on the new HQ complex, First will invest some £24million in modernizing its Leeds bus operation in the next 12 months.

The old depot at Kirkstall Road has become heavily congested

Volvo Truck and Bus MD retires

Glyn Parker, managing director of Volvo Truck and Bus Centre North, has announced he will retire this June.

Glyn has been part of the Volvo Group for almost 23 years, initially with Volvo at Eurotruck (acquired by Volvo in 1997) and since then he has held managing director positions at Manchester Truck and Bus, Darlington Commercials and more recently with Volvo Truck and Bus Centre North, based at Darlington.

Currently, Volvo cannot confirm a replacement for Glyn but says the process to find his successor is well under way.

Bluestar searching for focus group volunteers

Eastleigh based Bluestar has launched a poster recruitment campaign on its buses to attract volunteers to join new focus groups known as Passenger Panels. Alex Hornby, operations manager at Bluestar hopes to create four panels to focus on different sections of the network. Each Passenger Panel will have up to ten frequent bus users who will meet every three months to report their views and recommendations to Alex Hornby, who will preside over the meetings, and his management team.

Andrew Wickham, operations director for Bluestar and the sister bus companies within the Go-Ahead Group in the south west, says that the Passenger Panel focus groups will attract more constructive feedback on their services.

"Bluestar already encourages direct contact to the management by way of feedback forms on the buses and the direct email contacts, but we believe that scheduled meetings with selected volunteers will give us a concise and reliable base on which to make improvements to the network," he said.

Chobham shuttle takes advantage of poor service

A new peak-hours commuter shuttle bus service was launched last Monday in a partnership between Surrey County Council and Chobham Community Interest Company (CIC), a social enterprise.

The shuttle, is a practical and convenient alternative to driving to Woking and, at less than £2 a trip, will be a huge saving on the £10 daily charge to park in Woking.

The shuttle will run every 25 minutes starting at 7.15am from Bowling Green Road to Woking Station and back to Chobham, throughout the morning until quarter to nine. Later in the day the service reverses and from 5pm will pick up passengers from Brewery Road car park, again every 25 minutes, with the last shuttle leaving for the village at 7.15pm.

Tickets for the shuttle must be bought in advance from Chobham Post Office. David Munro, executive member for transport, said: "Congestion all over the country is only going to get worse and the council has to look at other options to tackle the problem.

"Initiatives like this are not only environmentally friendly, but they are also cost effective for our residents. Our aim is for the service to be self sufficient so I would urge residents to make use of the scheme."

ChobQuest indicated more than 250 Chobham residents worked in London, Woking or Guildford with over 100 travelling by train. The area has an infrequent bus services, very high parking charges and increasing petrol costs meaning the opportunity for a commuter shuttle was obvious.

First's latest Greater Manchester bus customer to win the monthly £1,000 prize in the company's Travel to Win promotion is Paul Dawson from Broughton, Salford. The promotion was launched in November 2007 and will run, with monthly prizes of £1000, until November this year. To enter, customers simply hold onto their tickets before sending them into the company with their name and contact details. Every qualifying name is entered into the monthly prize draw. All First buses in the Manchester fleet display advertisements and posters giving details of the prize draw. Pictured is Paul Dawson receiving his prize from First's marketing assistant, Clair Plant. Paul said he's putting his win towards a family holiday in Italy later this year.

Arriva SW starts hospital route

Next Monday, Arriva Scotland West will introduce a new bus route which will allow a number of Renfrewshire people direct access to the Royal Alexandra Hospital, Southern General Hospital and Braehead Shopping Centre

The circular bus service 59/59A – 59A operating anti clockwise around Foxbar and Glenburn, will serve Govan, Southern General Hospital, Braehead Shopping Centre, Renfrew, Glenburn and Foxbar.

Ralph Roberts, director and general manager at Arriva Scotland West said: "We are delighted to be introducing not only this vital hospital link to the Renfrewshire area, but a first ever direct bus link from Foxbar to Braehead Shopping Centre. The new service will make it so much easier for passengers travelling to these locations and we hope customers take full advantage of the service"

Residents of, Paisley, Glenburn and Foxbar will now enjoy a 30 minute service to the RAH and a 15 minute frequency to Renfrew, Braehead and the Southern General Hospital. Alternatively, residents of Govan, Braehead and Renfrew will enjoy a 15 minute service to the RAH, Glenburn and Foxbar.

Service 59 replaces 90% of Arriva's withdrawn service 21 route – excluding the Newmains and Arkleston area and operating along Paisley Road, Renfrew instead.

New deputy TCs appointed

Six new deputy traffic commissioners have been appointed to take up posts in the West Midland and Wales and Eastern Traffic Area Offices.

The six new deputies are Jim Astle, Miles Dorrington, Simon Evans and Tony Seculer, who will be based in the West Midlands and Wales, and Marcia Davis and Gillian Ekins who will be based in the East.

Making the announcement, senior Traffic Commissioner Philip Brown said: "I am delighted that we are able to strengthen our team with appointment of these six new deputies.Each of them bring specialist legal knowledge to their new role and individual skills which will help to underpin the excellent work already being carried out in these two important Traffic Areas.

"All Traffic Commissioners and their Deputies are looking to improve standards in the coach and bus industry and we will continue to pursue this."

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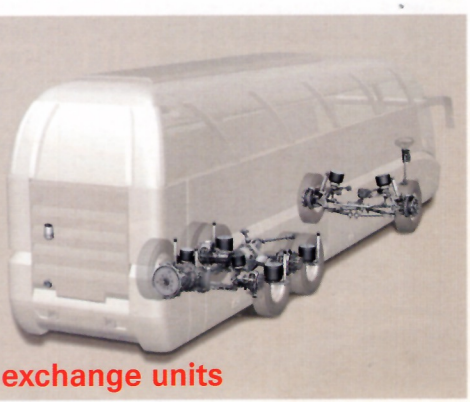

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Roads

Following the recent introduction of Moto's new 1p meal scheme for drivers, the service station was contacted by a number of tour guides and couriers, who were excluded from the new scheme. As a result Moto are reintroducing the 1p meal for guides and couriers with immediate effect. Tour guides and couriers will qualify for the 1p meal at all Moto restaurants providing they are in uniform and are with a driver, carrying passengers, who has a Moto Coach membership card.

A scheme to replace the worn surface of the A45 at Great Billing in Northamptonshire was due to start this week and would have required an eastbound carriageway closure this weekend. A delay to the start of works means the scheme will now commence on Tuesday, 27 May and is due to be complete by Monday, 23 June. Work will take place between 8pm and 6am on weekday nights and over the weekends from 8pm on Fridays to 6am on Mondays. During the working times there will be complete carriageway closures either east or westbound depending on which carriageway is being worked on at the time. Clearly signed diversions will be in place during these closures.

Resurfacing work will started on the A5 at Markyate on Monday, for six nights. Work will be carried out on both carriageways at the London Road and Old Watling Street crossroads. Two-way traffic signals will be in place on the A5 while works are carried out. The junctions of London Road and Old Watling Street will be closed.

Moderate delays are expected on the M62 at Junction 30 (Rothwell) due to resurfacing and road marking works. The westbound exit slip road will be closed between 8pm and 6am from Friday to Sunday. A diversion will operate via Junction 29.

Fraser Eagle wins exclusive Flybe deal

18-month trial leads to three-year contact to transport airline staff and passengers in UK and Eire

Fraser Eagle has confimred that after completing an 18 month trial, it has secured an exclusive contract to provide transport at all UK and Southern Ireland airports for passengers and aircrew in emergency situations on behalf of the airline company Flybe.

Under the contractual agreement Fraser Eagle will provide an exclusive and fully-managed transport service to transfer passengers and aircrew on flights which have been delayed, diverted or cancelled either to another airport or to overnight hotel accommodation.

Flybe is now Europe`s largest regional low-cost airline, operates out of more UK airports than any other airline and is a market leader in developing its range of passenger services.

"We are delighted to have agreed this deal with Flybe, which sees us provide transport for thousands of passengers by either coach or other small vehicles on a daily basis over the next three years," says Fraser Eagle group managing director Kevin Dean.

"We look forward to delivering an excellent transport service to Flybe and forming a lasting partnership with them. This is an important contract for Fraser Eagle as it sees us take our product into yet another new sector - the airline industry. This deal - together with several other important contract wins - consolidates our position in the UK and European passenger transport market and gives us a platform on which to continue expanding our operations."

A statement on the operator's website says: "This is an important deal for Fraser Eagle as it allows us to use this as a template to move forward with other airline industry clients and cement our position in the industry as a leading provider of managed transportation, hotel accommodation (Hotac) and respite provision."

Harlequin pays price for unfair dismissal

Harlequin Coaches, which operates the Springkerse park-and-ride and other services, has been ordered to pay former driver Bel Lindie more than £4,000. The money was awarded by an employment tribunal on the grounds of unfair dismissal, not being provided with terms and conditions of employment and loss of her statutory rights.

The tribunal in Glasgow heard that Mrs Lindie (55) of Park Crescent, Bannockburn, worked for Harlequin Coaches between April 2006 and May 2007 and her regular bus route was the C30/31 around Riverside in Stirling.

She was sacked on May 17 last year after her employers claimed she had not carried out safety checks on her vehicle and failed to keep to bus routes and timings. The company also said she had used its coaches for purposes outside her employment.

But the tribunal said it believed that Mrs Lindie had been sacked after challenging her pay and lack of contract covering her terms and conditions of employment. At the time she believed she was being underpaid because she was female.

The judgement said: "The respondents were extremely unhappy at the approach of the claimant to query her pay and to seek a contract of employment. Aspects of behaviour to which they had either turned a blind eye or alternatively had condoned and encouraged were then used as a basis for disciplinary action leading to dismissal."

Mrs Lindie suspected she was being underpaid after reading a job advert for a driver which appeared to offer a greater pay than hers. She made three attempts to find out her rate of pay. A contract of employment was provided but it failed to provide the hourly rate of pay and Mrs Lindie refused to sign it.

On May 14, 2007 she was called to a disciplinary meeting where Harlequin accused her of failing to carry out required daily checks on her vehicle and using their buses without consent.

The meeting was postponed until May 16, where a further claim of cutting short a service was included. On that occasion Mrs Lindie's service arrived at the bus depot three minutes before it was due at Stirling bus station. The tribunal heard that Mrs Lindie had on board an unwell man whom she offered to drive home in her own car. A second incident was also included and not disputed. Mrs Lindie was then sacked. She failed in appealing against the decision a month later.

The tribunal said it felt the company's policy on checks was "not effective" and failing to discipline drivers for not carrying them out "sent the message that non-compliance was not an issue".

Fares from $1 still not enough to tempt the people of Los Angeles from their cars

Megabus finds LA residents won't change

Coach USA's Megabus.com subsidiary, which offers $1 fares, will stop taking bookings on several routes out of Los Angeles and expects to decide very soon whether to pull out of the city.

Even miniscule $1 fares to San Francisco and Las Vegas have not been enough to tempt LA residents out of their cars. Megabus.com, a subsidiary of Coach USA which began bargain bus service last August from Los Angeles, will stop taking bookings a number of routes for trips after June 8. Megabus.com had already stopped serving San Diego and Phoenix from L.A. earlier this year says it could end all services from the city.

Dale Moser, president of Megabus.com, said the Paramus, N.J., company, which operates a thriving network in the Midwest and elsewhere, expects to decide by the end of this week whether to pull out of Los Angeles.

"Quite frankly, the ridership hasn't been as robust as we'd like," Mr Moser said. "We might just have to discontinue the service. Although the company's 56-seat buses occasionally leave of Los Angeles 75% or 80% full, they are often carrying as few as 12 riders. We're not seeing increasing trends. The graph has leveled off."

The Los Angeles performance is in sharp contrast to the Midwest, where Megabus.com serves 17 cities and has seen its business increase 137% during the last year. Mr Moser said the company had recently expanded its services to eight East Coast cities. He said he could not understand why more Californians hadn't warmed up to Megabus.

"Given high gasoline prices, congested roads, growing environmental consciousness and marquee destinations such as Los Angeles and Las Vegas, we all truly believed that this would be an outstanding market," added Mr Moser. "Maybe, truth be told, we are just unable to get them out of their cars."

Megabus.com has already stopped taking bookings from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, San Jose and Millbrae for trips after 8 June, and from Los Angeles to San Francisco and Oakland after June 22.

Mr Mose concluded: "These actions are precautions, pending a final decision. We will honour the tickets that have been sold. We're not going to leave passengers stranded."

Tour Providers' "More Tours – Less Fuel" initiative

Tour Providers, group tour planning and contracting specialists, has announced a new initiative that could help coach tour operators and regular group organisers reduce the overall fuel outlay on their tour programme.

It is based on the simple principle that if more of the tours organised are to destinations closer to home, over the course of the season less fuel will be used, enabling prices to be kept in check. Tour Providers will take a look at operators/organisers existing tour programme, free of charge, and suggest interesting new tours, both in the UK and abroad, that are based closer to home.

Tour Providers founder Christopher Kingsley added that: "It would of course be false economy to throw out destinations that are regular favourites with your customers just to save fuel. However, most operators/organisers replace a proportion of tours in their programme each year and these are the ones we can look at. What we're offering isn't rocket science but many operators are too busy at this time of year to devote time to tour planning and would value "new eyes" looking at their programme."

Tour Providers would then set-up at net rates any suggested new tours the operator/organiser wished to include, charging their normal set-up fee.

■ Tour Providers can be contacted on 01432 890742 or through their website www.tourproviders.co.uk

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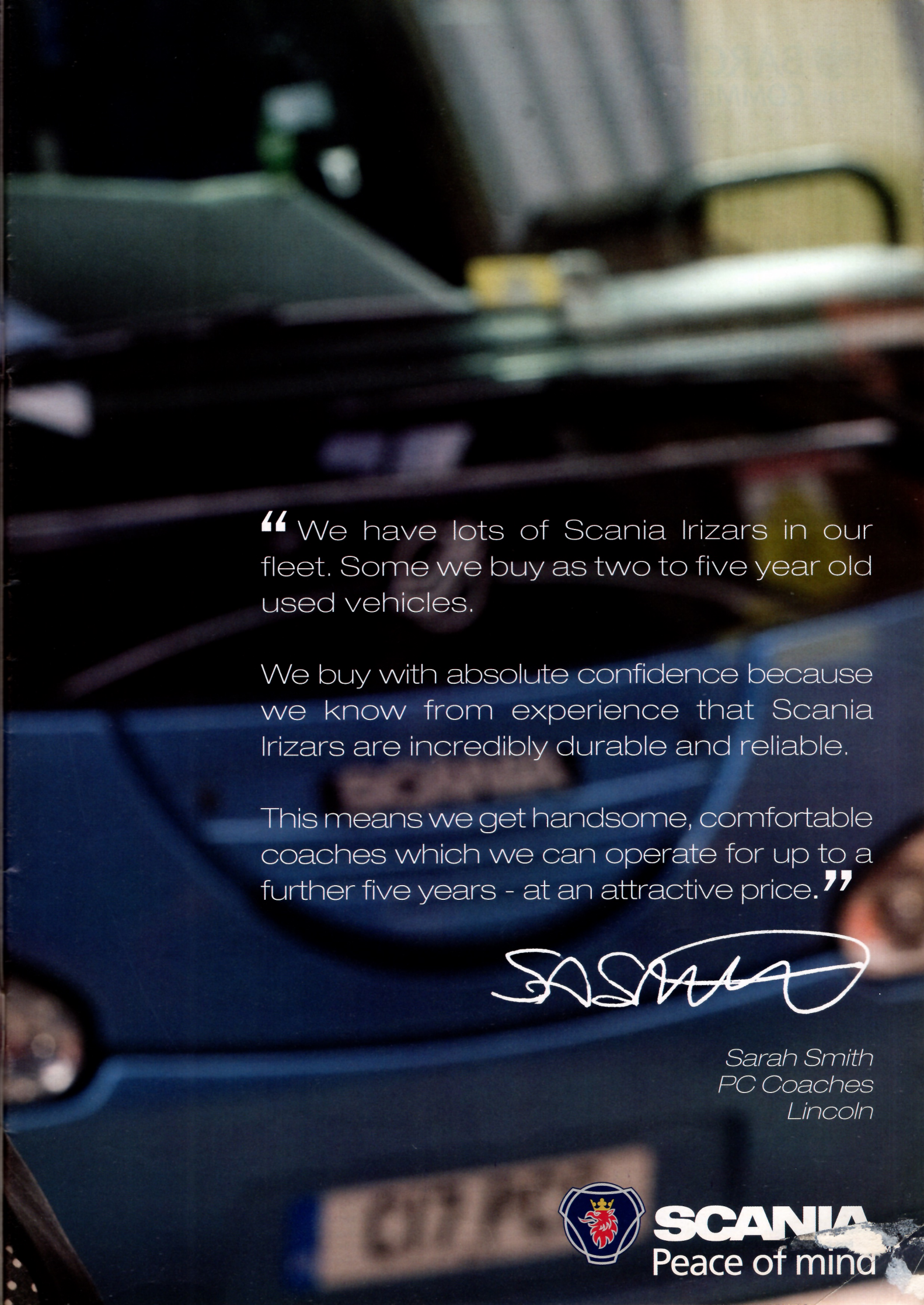

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WALES

Andrew Hoseason, Cardiff Bus engineering director and Mike Taylor, CTPG chairman

Barry bus depot to reawaken

Dedicated museum for Welsh heritage buses and coaches

Barry's neglected former Western Welsh bus depot looks set to reawaken after the Cardiff Transport Preservation Group (CTPG) finally obtained planning permission from the Vale of Glamorgan Council for the creation of a museum dedicated to Welsh buses and coaches.

The group has been featured several times over the past year in *CBW*, having been a recipient of a number of Cardiff Bus vehicles, most recently including a Leyland Lynx, Optare Metrorider and a Volvo Ailsa.

Mike Taylor, CTPG chairman told *CBW*: "It's taken ten years of negotiations to get to where we are now and several generations of people and councils, but we now have a confident future ahead of us. Ours will be the only dedicated museum of its kind in Wales and in this respect, Wales has lagged behind our counterparts in England and Scotland. We're looking to concentrate purely on Welsh vehicles - we feel there are enough Routemasters in museums as it is. It's a nice traditional home for Welsh PSVs are they're not very well loved in preservation at the moment, tending to be the ones that get cannibalised for spares."

The depot building itself is of interest as it is the last substantial Western Welsh depot still standing, although smaller examples survive in Carmarthen and Newcastle Emlyn. Originally opened in 1938, Barry depot can house 30 vehicles undercover and in its heyday in the 1950s was home to 58 vehicles, including those parked outside. However, the pressure of deregulation forced its closure in 1992 with the loss of 80 jobs, by which time the depot had become part of National Welsh. The site then passed to the Vale of Glamorgan Council and in the intervening period was in use as a store, hence the requirement for planning permission.

Over the next couple of months the CTPG together with the local authority, the Welsh Assembly Government and private funding will, improve the building infrastructure to ensure the depot is secure and a safe place to store and restore Welsh buses.

In a further development, Mr Taylor also revealed the CTPG is about to take ownership of a former Cardiff Bus Neepsend-bodied Guy Arab V open topper, which will hopefully debut at the Barry Island Festival of Transport on June 8.

■ For further details, visit *http://the-busdepot-barry.org/* or call Mike Taylor on 01443 862144.

First Cymru launches Welsh website

Swansea-based First Cymru has launched a Welsh language version of its website as part of its commitment towards becoming a fully bilingual organisation.

Passengers can now access information relating to First Cymru fares and special services either in the Welsh or English languages, according to their personal preference.

The website, which is derived from the FirstGroup standard template, now allows users to switch between languages simply by clicking a Cymraeg/English navigation button.

Tony McNiff, acting managing director of First Cymru Buses, said that the bilingual website is a significant step forward for the company's Welsh Language Policy.

"We have many customers, particularly in West Wales and the Swansea Valley areas, who prefer to receive information in Welsh, and they now have that option. The Welsh Assembly Government already requires certain organisations who provide services of a public nature to treat both languages equally. First Cymru is pleased to be moving in that direction on a voluntary basis," said Mr. McNiff.

Already, First Cymru offers some key items of marketing literature and vehicle route branding in both Welsh and English, a trend which is set to increase. Front line staff who speak both languages are encouraged to wear a badge, provided by the Welsh Language Board, to signify their ability to converse in Welsh.

Express Motors gets Tempo

Express Motors' latest brand new bus is this MAN-powered Optare Tempo.

Eric Jones, MD of the Penygroes-based family-run firm, profiled in *CBW* last summer, said: "We're most impressed with it mechanically – it's superb. We've managed to achieve 11mpg on our X1 Porthmadog – Llandudno service."

The vehicle is the firm's first Tempo and follows the successful trial of a demonstrator conducted at the end of last year.

"We've stuck with MAN, as with the remainder of our fleet, because you don't have to bother with AdBlue. I believe we're the largest operator of MANs in North Wales."

"It's now in its third week on the road, but it's already proving popular with our drivers and passengers alike, who have commented on the smooth ride, thanks to the independent front suspension."

The Tempo joins a bus fleet largely where Optare and MAN products feature strongly, including no fewer than six Optare Solos, two Optare Vectas, a Spectra, two Marcopolo MANs and three East Lancs-bodied MANs.

Curtains for Nightrider

First's weekend evening service pulled as subsidy hits £15 per passenger

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport's Nightrider bus service is to be withdrawn following a 15-month trial. The service was introduced last year to assess demand for late night public transport along the route of the two Glasgow Subway circles and SPT awarded a contract to First worth £296,303 to provide the service for 15 months.

However, despite substantial investment and publicity, passenger numbers have not been sufficient to ensure the service is viable. Following approval at SPT's operations committee, it has been decided to stop the Nightrider service in July.

An SPT spokesman said: "The service costs nearly £300,000 and on average there are 320 passengers over the Friday, Saturday and Sunday period. We can't continue to justify a subsidy of about £15 per passenger and, as a result, Nightrider's last service will be Saturday, 12 July."

With Subway passenger numbers and revenue increasing, SPT is looking at the possibility of extending the rail service, particularly on a Sunday. The spokesman added: "We're looking at this very closely but any extension of opening hours would also depend on additional sources of income to support the Subway's current maintenance schedule."

Boris drafts more police into London

Newly elected Mayor of London Boris Johnson says an extra 440 uniformed police staff are to be drafted in to patrol major London bus stations to "take back our public places".

The £11.3m scheme is aimed at stamping out minor crime and formed a key part of Mr Johnson's election manifesto. He intends to address youth crime on buses which is claimed to have risen 55% since the introduction of free bus travel for under 16-year-olds in 2005.

The 440 officers will be divided into teams of a sergeant, a constable and seven Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). These teams will staff major bus stations and their immediate surrounds. They are additional to the existing 1,200 officers who patrol on buses and around bus routes. Another 440 officers are also already in place from Safer Transport Teams, deployed in 21 outer London boroughs.

A 12-week pilot will see these teams focusing on West Croydon, Wood Green, and Canning Town in Newham. The scheme will then be rolled-out across the city within a year.

Mr Johnson said: "Recent tragic events have further highlighted the need to get a grip on crime. The creation of these new teams is a crucial part of our strategy for taking back our public spaces, cutting so-called 'minor crime' and anti-social behaviour, and increasing people's sense of safety."

Trent Barton opts for Moovera WiFi

Trent Barton has selected the Moovbox M Series mobile broadband gateway to deliver Internet connectivity on commuter coaches running between Nottingham and Derby. The operator has Wi-Fi-enabled eight Scania Irizar vehicles on its Red Arrow service.

Trent Barton will also utilise the Moovbox for GPS-based automatic vehicle location (AVL) to keep track of the fleet via Moovera's MoovManage remote monitoring system.

"We've made a significant investment to modernise our fleet of over 270 buses and are continually seeking new ways to provide better service to our customers," said Mark Greasley, commercial manager at Trent Barton. "By putting Wi-Fi hotspots on our vehicles we're offering passengers a way to make the most of the 40 minute journey. We chose the Moovbox as it offers us not only the Wi-Fi service but also GPS tracking and the ability in the future to connect other systems such as ticketing and security over the Internet to our operations centre."

The Moovbox delivers Wi-Fi Internet access on the Red Arrow vehicles at speeds up to 3.6 Mbps by creating a bridge between the coach and a next-generation cellular broadband network from Vodafone.

Buckinghamshire County Council has awarded Amey the contract for the management of Client Transport. From June 1, Amey will be responsible for arranging the transport for more than 17,000 Buckinghamshire residents daily, including students to schools and colleges, safeguarded children and adult social care service users.

The signing of the contract marks the end of an 18-month review of the way transport is delivered. From the outset, the aim has been to create a more efficient network of services, while maintaining the high standard of transport provided across Buckinghamshire.

Valerie Letheren (above), cabinet member for transportation, said of the decision: "Client Transport is integral to local communities across Buckinghamshire and is a lifeline to those who need to use it. We are looking forward to working with Amey on continuing to provide high quality levels of transport and care for our residents. We are pleased that our dedicated and experienced staff will continue to be involved in providing Client Transport Services. There are exciting times ahead and we will be working together to build even better services for those who rely on them."

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Briefly

New Zealand-based bus manufacturer Designline says it plans to keep all its staff when it shifts up the road to a Rolleston industrial park so it can expand to meet domestic and international demand. The company said it was attracted by development options, price and access to a larger labour market.

Bosses from Stagecoach which recently axed services between Desborough and Harborough met councillors at a meeting yesterday (Tuesday). Stagecoach, which runs the number 18 between Harborough and Kettering, reduced the service on the Harborough to Desborough section in April because it was losing money. Instead of 11 buses running throughout the day, the number 18 along that section has been reduced to just two, running from Harborough at 7.25am and 6.50pm.

New concessionary bus passes have led to some people in rural areas giving up work, claims a Lincolnshire councillor. The new rules have forced some low-paid rural workers to give up their jobs because they cannot afford the bus fare, according to councillor Marianne Overton. Calling for the introduction of all-day concessions, Coun Overton said: "I had a letter from the Pelican Trust which employs 75 people per week, some from the North Kesteven area. These employees have a printing works and make furniture. They have learning difficulties and only earn £2 a day. Half of the employees come by public bus and now have to pay to come to work."

A 71-year-old man has died in a road collision with a bus near Gerrards Cross, Harrow. A silver Ford Fiesta van collided with a single decker Carousel bus on the A40 Oxford Road at around 8.30pm lon Sunday. The driver of the van, who is from the area, died at the scene. He has not yet been formally identified.

Trolleybuses make their case

Two day conference aims to dispel the trolleybus myths

As public transport finds itself at the centre of the climate debate, the question of how buses can be made greener remains a big one. On September 4 and 5, the Trolleybus Conference for Great Britain aims to push the case for electric traction over other diesel alternatives and additions.

Sponsored by the London Bus Company, the conference will make the case that trolleybuses hold all the aces over competing forms of public transport. Unlike trams, a trolleybus system does not take years to install at great cost, requires few major roadworks and crew retraining is said to be swift, says organisers the Black Country Living Museum Transport Group.

The group claims trolleybuses feature greater acceleration, better fuel economy and reduced maintenance costs than conventional diesel systems. It claims: "Over 30 cities in the world already benefit from trackless electric traction. Once again the UK finds itself trailing in the quest for truly green transport technology."

A Van Hool AG300T articulated trolleybus will be operating on site at the museum for the duration of the conference, offering delegates the chance to experience the system for themselves.

Also present will be experts in the fields of manufacturer, planning, operation and maintenance of modern trolleybuses. On top of this, the museum will be offering food, superb conference facilities, and an opportunity to see Black Country life as it was lived during the industrial revolution.

■ The cost of the conference is £175 per delegate for the full two-day event. For further information and application forms, please contact 'Trolleyconference', The Black Country Living Museum, Tipton Road, Dudley DY1 4SQ, or call 0121 5579643.

New ADLs for Stagecoach in Dearne Valley

Stagecoach Yorkshire's new Dearne Valley buses have been launched, all carrying a new logo and livery. Thirteen ADL Enviro 300s, equipped with 46 seats and a seven camera CCTV system have now been delivered at a cost of almost £1.5m.

Stagecoach Yorkshire has been praised by the Minister of State for Transport for its commitment to passengers in the Dearne Valley. The Rt Hon Rosie Winterton, also MP for Doncaster Central, was in the area to launch the vehicles set to benefit bus users across the Dearne Valley.

The new buses are an addition to seven introduced in the area last year. All 20 now carry a fresh logo bearing the words "the dearne link" and feature an eye-catching livery. Ms Winterton said: "I am very pleased to see the results of Stagecoach's investment. Local bus services play a vital role in our communities and these new ultra-modern buses around the Dearne Valley area represent a significant commitment towards providing the level of service that passengers look for.

Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP cuts the ribbon launching the new Dearne Valley buses with (from L to R) Paul Lynch, MD of Stagecoach Yorkshire, and competition winners Wardene Riggs, James Perry and Wayne Bateman, holding their images which will appear on the new fleet.

"I am particularly keen that all public transport is responsive to the needs of everyone who wishes to use it, so I am pleased that this new fleet has low floor access, providing improved access for disabled and elderly passengers as well as parents with young children."

Joining Ms Winterton at the launch event were local people who won a competition run by Stagecoach to be the faces of the Dearne Valley services and have their image on the back of the buses.

Paul Lynch, managing director of Stagecoach Yorkshire, said: "We are delighted that Rosie Winterton joined us and our competition winners to launch our new-look network. It is a reflection of our commitment to deliver an affordable service."

"The Dearne Valley is a key area for us in terms of moving people between the towns of Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster and we feel we have an obligation to make this a pleasant experience."

MARTIN CURTIS

On May 12, 1908 the 'first' Bristol-made bus commenced operation between Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Victoria Rooms. To commemorate this event, a number of privately owned Bristol-built buses re-enacted this run on Monday May 12, 2008. The vehicles ran from the Centre, Bristol, to Victoria Rooms and then followed the original route to Clifton Christchurch, turning on the Downs and returning from the Suspension Bridge area. They spent a period on display and attracted substantial media interest. "Bristol" buses were built until 1983 and became famous world-wide. Over 37,000 were produced at the Brislington works for use in every corner of the UK with large numbers also exported, including to South Africa, India and New Zealand. A number remain in use in New Zealand. Some 4,000 were built for local operation by Bristol Tramways and Bristol Omnibus Company, the final example only withdrawn from service last year.

Cityspace buys Kizoom

Cityspace has acquired Kizoom, a UK market leader in delivering real-time transport information to the internet and mobile devices.

Founded in 1999, Kizoom's client list boasts the five biggest UK mobile operators, Transport for London (TfL), National Rail Enquiries (NRE), the DfT, Trainline and eight Traveline regions.

"Kizoom is a great fit for the business in several ways," said Andrew Fraser, Cityspace CEO. "As an established Cityspace technology partner, collaborating on some of our flagship transport solutions such as our latest deployment of timetable to mobile alert for National Express East Coast rail network, the company has demonstrated outstanding technical skills and has valuable strengths in application development. Kizoom brings proven expertise in mobile solutions for the transport market at a time when Cityspace is fast establishing itself as providers of effective, ipassenger solutions."

Commenting on the acquisition from Kizoom, Damian Bown, MD, said "Kizoom's experience in running systems for TfL and National Rail equips Cityspace with the skills and credentials to offer an unparalleled portfolio of multi platform passenger information solutions. This is a great partnership with a well of untapped opportunities ahead."

Simulators saving the planet in Denmark

Thales and Finland's STC Simulator Training Oy have launched the BUS3000 bus and coach-driving simulator, which is says will save fuel and minimise pollution by reducing the number of training vehicles on the roads.

The first simulator - which will consume six tonnes of oil equivalent (toe) per year, compared with 64 toe for a training vehicle - is to be delivered to Danish training organisation TSU in autumn 2008.

Thales says BUS3000 meets the requirements of European directive EU 2003-59, which applies to all coach, bus and truck drivers throughout the European community. As well as obtaining the relevant driving licences, initial training for beginners and continuing training for experienced drivers will be mandatory in these categories of professional drivers when the directive comes into effect.

"With 500,000 drivers requiring training every year, BUS3000 will help meet current requirements at the same time as responding to future mandatory training needs," said Chris Gane, vice president training and simulation at Thales. "It overcomes the shortage of qualified driving instructors, guarantees completely safe training to reduce the risk of accidents on the road, as well as responding to environmental concerns by reducing fuel consumption and with that pollution. As a result, the concept represents the best training opportunity for major passenger transport operators today.

"The alliance between Thales and STC draws on the complementary expertise of the two companies and offers customers a simulation solution building on proven TRUST3000 technology," added Gane.

Elements of TRUST3000 incorporated into BUS3000 include the visual database, the exercise creation tool, the user interface and the automatic assessment tool.

Helsinki-based STC has already developed and delivered three bus-driving simulators for customers in Belgium and Finland. For the BUS3000 project, the company contributed its knowledge of bus and coach driver training, and its expertise in designing and manufacturing simulator cabs and associated software developments.

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INTERNATIONAL

Hybrid batteries lose power in Toronto

Lower than expected fuel savings and battery life casts shadow on hybrids

Toronto Transit Commission's hybrid electric-diesel buses are experiencing problems with batteries lasting only half as long as the manufacturer promised. About a third of the lead/acid batteries in the fleet of 275 hybrid buses delivered in 2006 have been exhausted. They had been expected to last at least five years.

TTC's chief general manager told local press: "The battery failures come on top of TTC testing that has shown the buses are producing just half the expected fuel savings, using just 10% instead of 20 to 30% less diesel than a conventional bus, although TTC expect this figure to improve."

Mr. Webster defended the decision to buy the Orion VII hybrids - which cost $734,000, compared with $500,000 for a conventional bus. He said TTC and manufacturer Daimler Buses North America were trying to sort out the battery problem, which is covered under the warranty.

"We think the hybrid bus is a good bus. That's the bottom line for us. It's got some issues, absolutely," Mr. Webster said. "But we think we're going to address these issues."

By the end of 2008 TTC will have 564 hybrid buses - making up about a third of its bus fleet - with much of purchase cost covered by the federal and provincial governments in funding which mandated buses using alternative fuels. Within five years, close to half of TTC's fleet is scheduled to be hybrid.

Toronto Transit has experienced battery problems with Orion VII hybrids

Adam Giambrone, city councillor and chair of TTC, said the battery problems mean the jury is still out on whether the buses were a good investment: "We're still formulating our opinion on the hybrids."

He said the hybrid drive system could be a "transitional technology" and that down the road, electric buses could come onto the market, or the TTC could, on busier routes, even return to using trolley buses - which it abandoned in the 1990s.

Mr. Webster said New York has been experiencing similar problems with its fleet of Orion VII hybrids.

Jake Keyes, a spokesman for Daimler, which runs the former Orion Bus Industries plant in Mississauga where the buses are partly manufactured, said the battery problem was specific to Toronto's buses and has not occurred with its other hybrid buses running in New York and San Francisco.

The company's newer models include a different, lithium-ion battery that Mr. Keyes said lasts longer, but Mr. Webster said TTC was not convinced the new battery would fix its problem. He said: "While we are happy to consider it, it's up to the manufacturer to prove to us these things actually function.

"It is fairly common for transit agencies to run into kinks with new vehicles, and TTC has had problems before, including with vehicles running on compressed natural gas that it bought from Orion Bus Industries in the 1990s. We had to scrap 50 of those buses and convert another 50 to diesel, after engine problems, potentially leaky gas tanks and other complaints."

TTC blames its hybrid buses' fuel-economy problems on their application. They currently operate on suburban high-speed routes, where hybrid engines are less efficient. Once more of the buses are running on stop-and-go congested routes downtown, Mr. Webster says, their fuel economy should improve as they would rely more on electric power created through its regenerative braking system.

Teamsters to represent First school drivers

School bus drivers and aides with First Student in Batavia and Elba, New York turned out in full force to elect the Teamsters as their bargaining representative. All 25 drivers and aides cast their ballots, gaining the representation of Teamsters Local 264.

"We're on cloud nine," said Sue Pellegrino, a First Student driver.

"School bus drivers with First Student are among the lowest paid workers in this area. For the responsibilities we have, we need fair pay and benefits. We don't have sick days or holidays or anything. This was a long time coming."

The drivers and aides work out of two depots in the towns of Batavia and Elba, located midway between Buffalo and Rochester. The workers had been unsuccessful in two previous attempts to unionise over the years. According to Teamsters Local 264 organizer Scott Chismar, the victory is the latest in an effort to organise private school bus and transit workers across the country. Drive Up Standards is a national campaign to improve safety, service and work standards in the private school bus and transit industry. Since the campaign began in 2006, more than 7,000 workers have become Teamsters.

Tata to establish bus plant in Africa

Tata Africa, part of India's Tata Motors, is planning to establish a vehicle manufacturing plant in East Africa. Tata Africa managing director, Naresh Leekha claims plans to set up the plant are at an advanced stage after it received approval from its head office in Johannesburg, South Africa.

"We will set up a bus manufacturing plant by the next financial year to serve the Eastern and Central Africa markets including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Malawi, and Zambia," said Mr Leekha. He added the size of the investment provided substantial evidence Tata Africa was to become a long-term player and the venture would assist in creating a great many local jobs.

The plant will be situated in Kenya and assemble the chassis with locally built bodywork. Already, the company assembles its light commercial vehicles and pick-ups in Mombasa in collaboration with Marshall East Africa at Associated Vehicle Assemblers (AVA).

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FINANCIAL

US drives FirstGroup growth

FirstGroup has delivered a strong set of annual results

First UK Bus continues to invest in new fleet additions across the country

Growth in its North American transport interests helped FirstGroup to deliver its best ever set of results, with turnover increasing by £1 billion to approach the £5 billion marker, and pre-tax profits before exceptionals growing 27%. Much of the increased turnover came from a six month contribution from Laidlaw International inc, which was acquired on 1 October for US$3.5bn.

FirstGroup's chief executive Moir Lockhead said that this has been a year of significant achievement for the Group with further strong performance across all businesses. "The acquisition of Laidlaw, completed during the year, established the Group as the market leader in North America and provides a unique opportunity to create value by leveraging scale, and to increase earnings through improved operating efficiencies and the delivery of substantial synergies," he said.

Results for the year ended 31 March 2008 show that group turnover grew 27% from £3.71bn to £4.71bn, and the group's adjusted operating profit rose 39% from £259.2m to £360.1m, with the majority of the increase coming from the expanding North American business.

The Group's pre-tax profits before goodwill and exceptionals rose to £249m from £195.8m a year ago, although taxation, and various exceptional costs, brought the retained profit to £133.3m which was 30% up on 2007, and 14% up on 2006, which was a better year. Net debt for the group increased from £516.2m to £2,161m, largely through the Laidlaw acquisition, but there are plans for a further share issue to reduce this amount.

The growth of the UK Rail business, which makes First the largest train operator, and the North American business, has relegated the UK bus division to third place in terms of turnover and just second on profit, with the original business now contributing only a third of the Group profit. Turnover in the UK bus division rose 2.9% from £1073.7m to £1104.9m, (4.1% in 2007), but the operating profit (£122m) raced up by 18% from £103m, with a further £5.8m property profits, mainly from the sale of Acton bus depot to be taken into account. The margin increased from 9.6% to 11%, achieved both through passenger growth and economies. Turnover in the UK rail division rose 6% from £1824.1m to £1937m, with the operating profit rising from £108.8m to £120m, with the margin rising from 6% to 6.2%. In North America turnover rose, (following the six-month contribution from Laidlaw operations), from £802.9m to £1370.3m, with operating profits rising from £68.2m to £130.7m, and the margin rising from 8.6% to 9.5%. The Greyhound business, which was acquired from Laidlaw, is shown separately, because its margins are a mere 3.1%. The first six months' turnover was £280.8m with operating profit of £8.8m. First stresses that the best results occur in the summer months, and although there had been a strategic review which could have led to closure or serious cuts, it now feels that development strategies which include market pricing, add-on extras and property integration will secures an improved future.

The group spent £71m on capital expenditure in the UK Bus division (£161.7m in 2006/7, although £84m went on lease restructuring), with investment made primarily in Glasgow, Bradford, Leeds, Bristol, Manchester and South Yorkshire. The group continues to target its investment in towns and cities with potential for passenger growth. Investment in new vehicles, together with initiatives to further improve maintenance and engineering functions, has delivered lower lost mileage and improved levels of punctuality and reliability.

"Despite the weaker economic backdrop the Group is well positioned with a balanced portfolio of operations and approximately 50% of the Group's revenues secured under medium-term contracts in the UK and North America. Although it is early in the new financial year, the Group continues to trade well and the outlook remains positive," said Mr Lockhead.

■ FirstGroup has raised £236 million from a new share placing, which will be used to partly refinance its $3.5 billion (£1.8 billion) acquisition of Laidlaw. The 43.8 million new shares were placed with institutions at 540p each.

SUMMARY

Year ended 31 March	2008 £m	2007 £m
Turnover:		
Continuing operations	4,707.6	3,708.8
Operating cost	(4,347.5)	(3,449.6)
Operating profit	360.1	259.2
Operating profit (after exceptionals)	261.7	207.3
Profit/(Loss) from disposals	5.8	(3.7)
Operating profit (after disposals)	267.5	203.6
Pre-tax profit	249.0	195.8
Pre-tax profit (after exceptionals)	151.9	140.2
Retained profit	133.3	102.1
Net Debt	2,161.0	516.2
DIVISIONAL RESULTS		
UK Bus: Turnover	1104.9	1073.7
Operating profit	122.0	103.0
UK Rail: Turnover	1937.0	1824.1
Operating profit	120.0	108.8
North America: Turnover	1370.9	802.9
Operating profit	130.7	68.2
NA Greyhound: Turnover	280.8	–
Operating profit	8.8	–
Other (inc trams): Turnover	14.6	8.1
(Operating loss)	(21.4)	(20.8)

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NORTH

A court has heard that in an accident where a bus driver collided with and killed a lollipop lady, the driver may have suffering a coughing fit which caused him to lose control of the vehicle near the Seedley County Primary School, Manchester.

A Manchester court heard the bus crossed the road, mounted the pavement and struck Stephanie Davies, 35, before scraping the school wall and coming to a halt. Mrs Davies, a mother of two from Salford, was trapped under the vehicle and died at the scene.

Stephen Wilson, 57, of Coniston Grove, Salford, denies causing death by dangerous driving. He was driving the single-deck Arriva bus when the incident occurred in September 2006. Prosecutor Adrian Farrow told the jury that Mr Wilson's driving fell "far below the standard to be expected of a careful and competent driver". He added that the collision was caused by a "gross lack of concentration or distraction". The trial continues.

■ Go North East, Nexus and Prudential Assurance Ltd are working together in the first partnership of its kind in the region to make sure the new Washington Galleries bus interchange is built to standards which tackle everything on the list of passengers' top ten most hated features at bus stations.

Confusion over who is in charge, poor quality waiting areas, poor quality cleaning standards and a lack of security are just some of the areas passengers have complained about to Go North East. However, when plans were drawn up for the new bus interchange, the partners were able to seize the opportunity to take a fresh look at the entire passenger experience and work together to provide the highest possible standards of information, supervision and management for passengers.

Every aspect of the day to day operation of the new bus station is covered by the partnership agreement which will see Go North East running the bus station with Prudential making sure safety, cleaning and maintenance standards are of the same high quality as the Galleries shopping malls and Nexus providing quality signage and passenger information. Nexus will also monitor the bus station standards to make sure they are being maintained at the highest level.

The new station will also have the area's first travel and ticket information centre capable of providing both bus and rail information. With access to information on local buses, Metro and longer distance train travel, passengers will be able to plan journeys to most destinations in the country using this one-stop-shop.

Go North East MD, Peter Huntley said: "It is not often that we get the opportunity to tear up the existing rules and address all of the issues that users have raised with us as being problems. Through this positive partnership with Prudential and Nexus people using the new bus station will notice a huge difference when it opens. By working together we will eliminate the problems often experienced when there are separate local authority and operator staff involved in the running of bus stations."

The bus station is being replaced as part of a multi-million pound investment at Washington Galleries by its owner Prudential. Nexus are also investing £278,000 in the new interchange which is due to open later this year. More than 1,100 buses travel to the Galleries every day with almost all services operated by Go North East.

MIDLANDS

Lecturers and disabled students in Derby have criticised a new bus pass because it cannot be used until after lessons have started. Students with learning difficulties at Derby College had been actively encouraged to use public transport to help extend their life skills.

However, since April many disabled students have resorted to using taxis.

The vice principal at Derby College, Steve Logan, confirmed about 130 students were affected.

"It's a major problem for us," he said. "About two thirds of the learners on our independent travel training programme are considering withdrawing from that now and actually going back to a more expensive taxi service that is local authority funded."

The government has said local authorities can extend the hours if they want and Derby council has said it has been in talks with Arriva, Stagecoach and Trent Barton to extend the pass times to accommodate these students.

■ A large screen will be set up at a tribunal hearing to see whether a Coventry bus driver took a toilet break in view of his passengers.

Pargat Singh has denied urinating in public and said he did so "out of view" when he was caught short at the Tesco store by the City's Ricoh Arena. CCTV footage of the alleged incident will be shown at the hearing later this summer.

Mr Singh was sacked in October last year, after a passenger on the bus complained to Travel West Midlands that her driver abandoned his bus to go to the toilet.

At a Birmingham Employment Tribunal preliminary hearing this week, Mr Singh was given permission to have his case for unfair dismissal heard in full. Mr Singh was said to have an excellent record after four years based at Coventry, said: "It is not true I did it where people could see me. I was behind the Tesco building."

EAST

A Norwich congestion charge would raise enough money from motorists to cover its own costs - but not to fund a significant improvement in public transport or other major transport schemes, according to a report. But the report by Norfolk County Council does back a case for a Norwich Northern distributor road (NDR), saying it would produce similar city centre improvements, without the need for congestion charging.

The full findings of the report into road charging will be discussed at a public meeting next week. The council carried out a part government-funded study on road user charging to see whether it could help to tackle city congestion and enable major transport improvements in the future.

Briefly

■ **A three-year-old child caused a full-scale police search after he wandered away from his mother and hopped on a bus. Lee Loram became separated from his mother in Blackburn town centre market. He managed to travel to Bolton and back before he was discovered. Police drafted in additional officers from around the county to assist in the search. Lee was eventually spotted by a police officer after being separated from his mother for over three hours. They were reunited shortly afterwards.**

Briefly

Controversial plans to allow certain lorries to use a bus and cycle lane look set to get the go-ahead in Norwich on an experimental basis for 12 months, despite a raft of objections to the scheme. Under a county and city council initiative a freight consolidation centre has been established by Foulger Transport at Snetterton off the A11, which acts as a receiving point for deliveries from across the UK destined for companies in the city. The loads are then divided up into a smaller number of low emission lorries, but to make the journey quicker and more attractive to companies council bosses suggested the lorries taking part should be allowed to use the bus and cycle lane in Newmarket Road to avoid jams.

A woman has died after suffering injuries when the bus she was travelling on had to brake heavily to avoid crashing into two cars. The woman was on the 675 bus in Bradford City Centre when the incident happened on Saturday May 3. Police say that the single decker First bus was in Canal Road at the junction with Holdsworth Street, when it nearly collided with two unidentified cars.

David Munro (left), executive member for transport at Surrey County Council and Andrew Dyer, MD at Stagecoach South flew kites to launch six new ADL Enviro 200 buses for an enhanced route between Aldershot and Guildford this week. The popular route 20 that operates between the towns via Tongham, Ash and Normandy has been re-branded as the Kite route and the frequency of buses increased from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes until the evening, Mondays to Saturdays. The new single deckers are built on MAN chassis and meet the latest Euro 4 standard.

Andrew Dyer says that he is confident that the £550,000 investment in the improved route will be appreciated by bus users. "These new wheelchair accessible MAN buses are not only environmentally friendly but also people friendly. The new interior layout has comfortable, well spaced seating and low floors make for easy access for parents with baby buggies," he said.

The study also found that the NDR was essential if any charging scheme was to be effective in reducing overall congestion, claiming that without the NDR, new patterns of congestion would emerge as motorists tried to avoid the charge.

Sue Whitaker, Labour member for Lakenham and Norwich Area Committee chairman, said: "Norwich is a fast-expanding city and we need to do everything we can to make sure our transport infrastructure can support that growth. If the congestion charge study is brought to a close, then it is vital we continue to look at all other options available to us to best meet Norwich's future transport demands."

LONDON

The second East London Transit route from Barking town centre to Dagenham Dock via Barking Riverside will provide a new frequent bus service to serve the current and future residents and businesses of Barking Riverside when services begin in 2012.

Following a public consultation in May 2007, route option 'B' has been chosen. This runs from River Road and into Thames Road, down into Creek Road and Long Reach Road into the new Barking Riverside Development.

Construction of the first ELT route between Ilford and Dagenham Dock will commence in January 2009, with the service expected to be operational by Autumn 2009. Nigel Hardy, head of project initiation for the ELT, said: "The East London Transit will create a vital transport link for people in Barking, making journeys to work, school and social activities more reliable and comfortable.

"Using buses fitted with environmentally friendly engines and the latest commercially viable technology, the transit will produce less pollution, and with its own dedicated bus lanes, passenger travel times will also be shortened."

SOUTH EAST

Newbury Buses has announced changes to its 32 route which will mean faster more direct buses between Newbury and Basingstoke.

The operator says the changes will certainly improve the service between Newbury and Kingsclere and speed up travel for people going further afield between Newbury, the North Hampshire Hospital and Basingstoke.

The changes will also enable the use of double deck buses which are needed on the 32 route at peak times. But the 32 will no longer continue serving Bishops Green. Newbury is withdrawing from the small estate which is poorly supporting the present diversion of the 32.

Newbury Buses manager Russell Barrington-Crow said: "The diversion prevents the use of double deck buses which are needed on the 32 route at peak times. The diversion is also a disadvantage to through passengers who are the majority of people on the bus. They will benefit from more direct buses in future."

Diary

- **June 10-12: Paris Expo.** Versailles, France. 0033 148740482. *www.objectiftransportpublic.com.*
- **June 12-14: Mobility Roadshow.** Stoneleigh Park, Coventry. 0845 2410390. *www.mobilityroadshow.co.uk/*
- **September 6: Bus Driver of the Year Gala Dinner.** Hilton Hotel, Blackpool. 01829 770186
- **Sept 6-7: Bus Driver of the Year Final.** Blackpool. 01829 770186. *info@bdoy.co.uk. www.bdoy.co.uk*
- **Sept 16-17: UK Bus Awards Finalists' Luncheon, Seminar and Technical Visit.** Hilton Dartford Bridge, Kent. 0870 900 1450. *info@ukbusawards.co.uk. www.ukbusawards.co.uk*
- **Sept 24-25: Group Leisure & Travel Trade Show.** Birmingham NEC. 01908 613323. *www.leisureshow.com*
- **Sept 25-Oct 2: IAA Commercial Vehicles Show.** Hanover, Germany. *www.iaa.de*
- **Sept 28: EFE Showbus** International. Duxford Airfield, Cambridgeshire. *www.showbus.co.uk*
- **Sept 28-30: CPT Scottish National Conference.** Gleneagles Hotel, Perthshire. 0131 2722150. *www.cpt-uk.org*
- **Sept30: CPT 'One-Stop Shop'.** Scotch Corner Hotel, Nr Richmond, North Yorkshire. 0207 240 3131. *www.cpt-uk.org*
- **November 4-6: Euro Bus Expo.** Birmingham NEC. 0870 4294588. *www.eurobusexpo.com.*
- **Nov 6-8: CTA Show.** Manchester GMEX. 08707 743586. *www.communitytransportassociation.co.uk*
- **Nov 10-13: World Travel Market.** London ExCel. 0870 7333986. *www.wtmlondon.com*
- **Nov 18: UK Bus Awards Ceremony.** Battersea Evolution, London. 0870 900 1450. *info@ukbusawards.co.uk. www.ukbusawards.co.uk.*
- **November 25: SMMT Annual Dinner.** Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, London. 020 72357000.

Guided tours of Blenheim's 2,100 acres feature this summer for groups

Blenheim's summer garden tours launched

Groups can take an expert guided tour of the 2,100 acres of parkland for under £20

Green-fingered groups can take part in special tours of the formal gardens at Blenheim Palace this summer.

With ornate fountains, lakeside walks, rose gardens and the recently restored secret garden, groups can discover the history of the gardens at one of Britain's most celebrated palaces.

The special guided tour begins with coffee and biscuits in the palace's Indian Room, followed by a two hour tour with one of the Blenheim garden experts. Tours start at 10.30am and finish by 1pm.

Blenheim Palace, home to 11th Duke of Marlborough and the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, offers a memorable day out. Set in 2,100 acres of beautiful parkland landscaped by 'Capability' Brown, the exquisite Baroque Palace is surrounded by sweeping lawns, formal gardens and the magnificent Lake.

Inside, the scale of the Palace is beautifully balanced by the intricate detail and delicacy of the carvings, the hand painted ceilings and the amazing porcelain collections, tapestries and paintings displayed in each room. Situated in Woodstock, just 8 miles from Oxford, the Palace was created a World Heritage site in 1987.

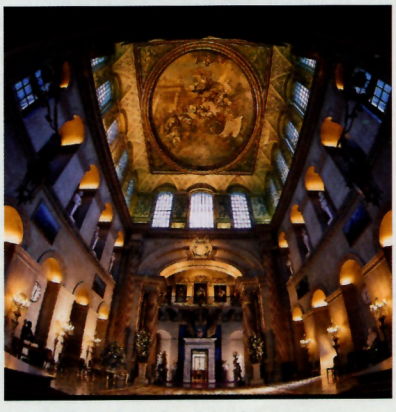
The palace and formal gardens are open from February 16 until December 14 this year. They are open daily until November 2, and then Wednesday to Sunday inclusive. The Park is open daily (except Christmas day).

The beauty and tranquillity of 'Capability' Brown's landscaped parkland, created in the 1760's and the Formal Gardens, created more recently, are unrivalled anywhere in Britain.

The Pleasure Gardens welcome young visitors and families and has special activities throughout the season. With delicious food and beautiful gifts available, Blenheim Palace is undoubtable one of Britain's greatest palaces.

The tour price for adults is £18.75 and for seniors it's £17.75. This doesn't include the cost of going into the palace itself, but tickets can be upgraded for an additional £5.

■ For further information telephone 01993 811091, e-mail *operations@blenheimpalace.com* or log onto *www.blenheimpalace.com*



Blenheim's stunning interior

DEALS OF THE WEEK

■ **For groups travelling up and down the M40 this summer, the Heritage Motor Centre is offering a change from the normal meal stops. The Centre is keen to encourage passing groups and coach operators to use its fully licensed café and toilet facilities and are throwing in the added option of a 15 minute taster tour of the Museum for free. Heritage Motor Centre has ample free coach parking and a designated groups drop off zone. Groups who pre book can also get a discount on food and a free meal for their coach driver. The 15 minute taster tours (pre booking essential) will give visitors an overview of what is one of the top car collections in the world. Coach companies wanting more information should contact John Bishop on *groups@heritage-motor-centre.co.uk* or 01926 645032.**

■ **Explore-At-Bristol, one of the UK's most exciting hands-on science centres, has a good benefit scheme for coach operators. Special group and trade rate are available when booking, one organiser goes free when bringing 20 or more visitors, there are free familiarisation visits for organisers and operators, free admission and hospitality for coach drivers and recognised courier guides, there are account facilities for tour and coach operators, an advance booking system with pay on arrival and fast track entry and it is an all-weather attraction. There is coach drop off on-site. Call bookings on 0845 3451235.**

Experience a tasty cafe and a museum taster

Unique bus fleet to star at Edwardian Crich

Eight unique buses, including the oldest surviving motor bus in the UK, will roll in to Crich in July, helping to make the Tramway Village's Edwardian Weekend a 'must be there' event for vintage transport fans everywhere.

Crich Tramway Village's popular Edwardian Weekend will take place on July 5 and 6, and will this year feature an added attraction with eight Edwardian buses - secretary of the Leyland Society, Mike Sutcliffe's entire collection. The eight Leyland buses and charabanc dating from 1908 to 1924, will include the country's oldest bus - a 1908 London Central X type - which celebrates its centenary just before the Crich appearance.

In addition to the bus fleet there will be numerous other Edwardian attractions over the weekend, including a rare opportunity to see the Village's 100-year-old Edwardian horse tram.

Visitors will be able to mingle with characters in period dress over the

HOLIDAY POUND

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Switzerland *(Franc)*	**1.97**
Norway *(Kroner)*	**9.43**
Hungary *(Forint)*	**291.90**
Czech Republic *(Koruna)*	**29.70**
Poland *(Zloty)*	**4.04**

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Cost per litre in pence:

Norway	**129.34**
Great Britain	**117.40**
Sweden	**114.16**
Italy	**114.14**
Germany	**109.70**
Netherlands	**104.86**
France	**103.89**
Belgium	**101.22**
Portugal	**101.71**
Switzerland	**100.69**
Czech Republic	**100.65**
Hungary	**100.60**
Austria	**98.80**
Ireland	**98.64**
Poland	**98.55**
Luxembourg	**87.58**
Spain	**86.63**

weekend and witness a number of fascinating historical mini-dramas including suffragettes, stable hands protesting over the loss of their jobs due to the development of the tramway, and First World War soldiers who will be keeping the peace. There will be also be music hall performances throughout the day, vintage vehicles and children's entertainment. Admission prices are Adult £10, Senior £9, Child (3-15) £5, Family (2 adults, 3 children) £28.00.

■ Download a booking form at *www.tramway.co.uk* or call 01773 854321.

Celebrate British beer

Earls Court, London will again host CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival this year, running between Tuesday August 5 and Saturday August 9. Around 65,000 people attended the 'Showcase for British Beer' last summer and it is expected the same numbers will come along this year to participate in the festival fun.

Over 500 tasty tipples from the smallest microbreweries and large regional brewers have been handpicked for visitors to try. These will include wheat beers, ciders, golden ales, stouts, porters, bitters, milds, bottle-conditioned beers, perries and traditional foreign beers from around the world.

The festival is not only about the ale though. Visitors will also be able to enjoy food, live music, entertainment, games, tombolas, and quizzes in the comfort of a family friendly atmosphere.

Other highlights of the festival include the family room where all those under the age of 18 remain throughout the festival and must be supervised by a family member. There will be tutored beer tastings where guests can learn to appreciate the different tastes and flavours - but places sell out quickly. There is also corporate hospitality and hat day is on Thursday August 4. This will be the fourth year that hat day has run and as usual it's silly hats on Thursday. So whether you have got one in the cupboard, or even better make one for the day, make sure you remember those hats! The best hats will win some superb prizes.

OPENING TIMES

- Tuesday 5th August: 5pm - 10.30pm
- Wednesday 6th August: 12 noon - 10.30pm
- Thursday 7th August: 12 noon - 10.30pm
- Friday 8th August: 12 noon - 10.30pm
- Sat 9th August: 11am - 7pm

TICKET PRICES

Discounted tickets can be bought in advance from *seetickets.com* or on 0871 2305594.

Drinking with no driving worries at CAMRA's beer festival

Drayton plans winter schedule

Drayton Manor in Tamworth, Staffordshire, is putting on a host of live shows and events over the latter half of the year. The 2008 summer spectacular will be Crusade to the Lost Temple, a 45-minute show with specialty acts from across the globe. In addition, The Cosmic Cats will be performing in the park's theatre, performing pop songs as part of the story of their battle to save the world. As well as the live shows, special events and days will be held throughout the year. September 7 is Grandparents Day, and October 25 to November 2 sees the park take on a spooky Halloween theme with a special scary show. Catch firework displays on November 1 and 2, then from November 22 to December 23, the revamped Thomas World will become a Christmas wonderland. For further information log onto *www.draytonmanorlive.com*

Briefly

A new permanent gallery at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, will become the home of Seized! Revenue and Customs Uncovered, the national museum of HM Revenue and Customs. The exhibition opened to the public last Friday and is the only one of its kind in Britain. Groups can see a variety of objects, including items used for drug smuggling, a collection of seized weapons and tourist souvenirs made out of endangered species. Entry to Seized! Revenue and Customs Uncovered is free and is open every day from 10am to 5pm. Call 0151 4784499 for details.

The Palace of the Peaks in Chatsworth, Derbyshire, is celebrating the fact that Keira Knightly will play the Duchess Georgiana in the new film The Duchess. The Duchess married into Chatsworth's Devonshire family in the 18th century, and now groups visiting the estate can get their own insight into the world of a Georgian It Girl with the help of special talks and guides. For further information telephone 01246 565300 or log onto www.chatsworth.org.

For a limited six-week run, The Wizard of Oz will be performing at the Royal Festival Hall in London from July 23 to August 31. Groups can catch the story of Dorothy and her friends as they travel to the Emerald City to find their hearts desire and a way back home. The show will include all the favourite songs, including Somewhere Over the Rainbow, Follow the Yellow Brick Road and We're off to see the Wizard. Groups booking to see the show can receive discounts depending on the size of your party. Ten or more get 10% off, 20 or more get 15%, and groups of 50 receive a 20% discount. These discounts only apply for the Monday to Thursday shows, as well as Sunday performances. Tickets cost between £12 and £50 depending on the seats. Call 0871 6632500 for details.

INHERITANCE TAX

Inheritance Tax – implications for business owners

The sudden death of a business owner can lead to many unforeseen consequences for relatives, colleagues and fellow directors. Nicholas Hughes looks at some of the implications for businesses

Business tax planning normally focuses on minimising income tax or corporation tax on profits. Capital gains tax and inheritance tax come into the picture when a particular transaction such as a gift of shares, sale of an asset or the transfer of a business is being planned, but have you considered your position in the event of the death before retirement of a director, partner or shareholder?

Q What is inheritance tax?

A Broadly speaking, it is a tax charged at 40 per cent on the value of an individual's estate on death, including the value of gifts and other transfers made by the individual within seven years of the death. IHT can also be charged on the value of property held in a trust, in certain circumstances. IHT is also charged at 20 per cent on some lifetime gifts.

RELIEFS AND EXEMPTIONS

There are many different reliefs and exemptions from IHT. Most people are aware that transfers between spouses or civil partners are generally exempt, both during lifetime and on death. Other general exemptions include the £3,000 annual exemption, exemptions for very small gifts, gifts of a limited amount on the occasion of a marriage, and any annual transfers that an individual can afford to make out of normal income.

Transfers during lifetime to other individuals are potentially exempt, which means that IHT may become chargeable if the transferor does not survive for 7 years from the date of the transfer, but otherwise the transfer will be fully exempt. Some may decide to transfer assets into a trust possibly because they want to gamble on living long enough to not pay the full 40% tax; they aren't sure about a spouse of a beneficiary; or maybe they are at risk of financial stress. There are many reasons.

From a business perspective, the two main reliefs are Business Property Relief (BPR) for business assets, and Agricultural Property Relief (APR) for agricultural land and buildings. We will look at these in more detail later.

Q How is IHT calculated?

A The following examples illustrate how IHT is calculated during lifetime (for a transfer that is not potentially exempt), and on death:

EXAMPLE 1: TRANSFER INTO A TRUST. NO DEATH INVOLVED

David made a chargeable transfer of £200,000 into trust A in January 2008, and another chargeable transfer of £300,000 to trust B in May 2008. He had made no other transfers in the previous 7 years. In each case, the trustees agreed to pay any IHT that became due.

David's annual £3,000 exemptions for 2007/08 and the previous year are deducted from the gross transfer of £200,000 in January 2008, leaving a net chargeable transfer of £194,000. No IHT is due, as the transfer does not exceed the nil rate band.

The 2008/09 annual £3,000 exemption is deducted from the gross transfer of £300,000 in May 2008, leaving a net chargeable transfer of £297,000. This is added to the brought forward amount of £194,000, giving a cumulative chargeable amount of £491,000. This exceeds the £312,000 nil rate band by £179,000, so IHT of £35,800 (£179,000 x 20%) is payable by the trustees of trust B. If David lives another 7 years there is no more tax to pay. Should he die sooner, then the trustees will have to pay the balance of the IHT.

EXAMPLE 2: DEALING WITH THE ESTATE AFTER DEATH

Jane died in May 2008, leaving an estate of £850,000, of which £350,000 was bequeathed to her husband, and £50,000 to a charity. The residue of £450,000 was bequeathed to other family members. Jane had made no transfers in the previous 7 years.

The bequests to Jane's husband and the charity are exempt. The chargeable estate of £450,000 exceeds the nil rate band by £138,000, so IHT of £55,200 (£138,000 x 40%) is payable.

PLANNING – THE BASICS

The most basic and essential requirement, especially for those in business, is to make a will. If a person dies 'intestate' (without having made a will), the law specifies how their assets are to be dealt with. This can

cause great difficulties for surviving family members. Where shares or other business assets are held, it can also affect business partners, directors, other shareholders and the business itself.

In addition to making a will, business partners and shareholders may also need to make other arrangements to deal with their partnership interest or shares.

It is necessary to decide what one wishes to happen to the shares or other assets, and then prepare a will and any other documents to ensure that these wishes are correctly carried out. The main issues with regard to business assets are the continuity of the business and the need to ensure that full advantage is taken of BPR and APR.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND SUCCESSION

Businesses should plan for the succession of ownership on the retirement or death of the current owner(s).

The most straightforward situation is that of a family-owned business, where it is intended that another family member will take over the running of the business. Here, it will normally be sufficient simply for the will to specify to whom the shares or other business assets are to be transferred, and to ensure that BPR is maximised (see below).

Where the individual is in a partnership, or is a shareholder in a company, with other partners or shareholders who are not family members, additional arrangements will need to be made.

The Articles of Association of most private companies include 'pre-emption rights', which provide that shares must first be offered to existing shareholders before they are sold to a third party. This will enable other shareholders to acquire shares from the personal representatives of a deceased shareholder.

More specifically, a separate Shareholders' Agreement can set out the exact wishes of all shareholders with regard to matters such as:

- the purchasers of any shares that become available;
- a formula for arriving at the purchase price; and
- how a purchase will be funded.

The purchase of shares or assets from a deceased shareholder or partner is very often funded by means of a life assurance policy taken out on the lives of all of the shareholders or partners concerned. Specialist advice should be obtained when taking out such a policy, as there can be inheritance tax or income tax 'pre-owned assets' implications where these policies are written in trust.

MAKING THE MOST OF BUSINESS PROPERTY RELIEF AND AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY RELIEF

BPR is available for business assets that have been owned for at least 2 years, and is very valuable – the relief (either on a lifetime transfer or on death) is:

100 per cent of the value of:

- An unincorporated business;
- An interest in a partnership;
- Shares in an unquoted company; or
- Securities in an unquoted company controlled by the owner.

50 per cent of the value of:

- Shares or securities in a quoted company controlled by the owner; or
- Assets used by a company controlled by the owner or by a partnership in which the owner is a partner.

BPR will not be available if the business in question consists wholly or mainly (50 per cent or more) of making or holding investments, or dealing in land, buildings, stocks, shares or securities. This can cause problems for certain types of business.

In addition, BPR is not available on specific assets (known as 'excepted assets') that are not used wholly or mainly for the purposes of the business, or that are not required for its future use. This can result in an unexpected loss of BPR where, for example, large cash balances have accumulated, and HM Revenue and Customs argue that they are not used or required for future business purposes.

Another important detail is that (with certain exceptions) BPR will not be available for an asset that is subject to a binding contract for sale. Shareholders' Agreements and other similar documents should therefore provide that other shareholders or partners have an option to buy shares or other assets from the personal representatives of a deceased owner, and the personal representatives should have an option to sell to the remaining shareholders or partners.

Where possible, wills should also be structured so that assets which qualify for BPR are left to non-exempt beneficiaries. Otherwise the relief could be wasted, which might happen if, for example, shares on which BPR was available were left to a surviving spouse, while other investments were left to other beneficiaries.

Similar considerations apply to APR, which is available for agricultural land and buildings. The relief is worth 100 per cent or 50 per cent, depending on the nature of the ownership of the asset.

MORE ADVANCED PLANNING

The introduction in October 2007 of transferable nil rate bands for spouses and civil partners has reduced the need for sophisticated planning in most cases where the value of joint estates is not more than £624,000.

For more substantial estates, significant IHT savings can be achieved by the careful use of available exemptions, including potentially exempt transfers, and normal expenditure out of income, and trusts.

Insurance can also play a part in meeting eventual IHT liabilities, where other measures are not possible or appropriate.

The IHT legislation is still very 'business-friendly', and proper attention and planning can ensure that significant savings can be achieved, and that a distressing time is not made much worse by being unprepared for the financial, taxation and general business consequences of a death.

Nicholas Hughes is head of Trusts and Estate Planning at Chiltern Tax Support for Professionals Limited.

PUBLIC INQUIRY BROWNS OF EDINBURGH

Ghosts return to haunt Browns

What started as a tip-off from an aggrieved former driver, led to VOSA uncovering a web of ghost drivers and close to 60,000km of missing mileage in three months as the firm, and its owner, was banned.

Browns of Edinburgh has effectively been put out of business and its owner banned from holding a public service vehicle operator licence for four years, following a public inquiry, last month. Scottish traffic commissioner Joan Aitken has found that the operators of the firm had lied and falsified tachograph records and drivers' hours, and that their actions had breached the European Working Time Directive and potentially put other road users at risk.

Alistair Brown, who traded as Browns of Edinburgh and had a fleet of 15 coaches, was found to have lost his repute and was disqualified. He faced a public inquiry in Edinburgh on 14 April, at which judgment was reserved. Subsequently, in a written judgment of over eleven thousand words, Ms Aitken said that this was one of the most serious cases that could come before a traffic commissioner, and she detailed the meticulous investigations carried out by VOSA traffic examiners, which had lasted nearly twelve months.

VOSA had received a complaint from an aggrieved ex-driver that the operator had been using ghost names on tachograph charts to hide drivers' hours offences. The allegations were that Ronald and Rhona Brown (husband and wife and respectively son and daughter-in-law of the operator) ran the office and the operation, with Mr Alastair Brown dealing with the fleet maintenance. It was alleged that drivers handed in tachograph charts and time sheets and were paid off the sheets. It was said that there was a day book which detailed the drivers' duties, and the allegation was that there were weekly rest offences because there was no regard to the back to back rest for the 12 day rule. It was also alleged that there were daily rest and daily driving offences and the complainer gave an example of what would happen - namely that passengers would be dropped off, at say, their London hotel and the driver would drive back to Scotland that night. Thus ghost drivers' names were used to hide the excessive driving. On the drive north, the driver would stop at a motorway service stop, remove his chart, insert a blank chart and drive back to base. At the office, a ghost name would be entered. The complainer gave some examples of ghost names, and also showed a text message which he had received from Rhona Brown asking whether he wanted to come up the road.

VOSA asked for tachograph records for all drivers for the period from 1 April 2006 to 30 June 2006, and 957 charts were received. On analysis, it was found that there was considerable missing mileage amounting to 58,000km that is 20.7% of the total fleet mileage. Between November 2006 and April 2007, further records were produced which reduced the missing mileage to 18,902km being about 5.2% of the total mileage. Traffic examiners also asked for copies of the named drivers' driving licences, and most were received, but eight were not produced.

The degree of missing mileage prevented an accurate analysis and in January 2007 the examiners called at the operator's premises and spoke to Rhona Brown and asked for the day book or diary. They wanted this to work out who was driving which vehicle and when. She said that the diary had been put in the bucket as it was a new year. She was asked to find it, and failing that, the examiners wished to see drivers' time sheets. She said the drivers did not use time sheets and worked off the tour itinerary sheets which had also been disposed of. She was also asked what driver agencies were used and she said it was "George at NWDA". Subsequent telephone attempts by the traffic examiners to contact anyone using that number were not successful. Further requests to the operator for copies of the outstanding driving licences, diary or work sheets and details of drivers' agencies used by them brought nothing forward other than a reply to say that they were still trying to get copies of the licences and that they had been unsuccessful in contacting NWDA.

In their analysis of the charts, they found (a) Some charts had not recorded the full journey as indicated from the odometer and location entries and therefore appeared to be false. (b) A considerable number of charts for some drivers appeared to be in a similar handwriting, including relief drivers' charts. (c) Daily and weekly rest periods could not be accurately calculated because either, charts were missing or information was not supplied from other sources such as diaries. (d) Drivers' hours offences.

Browns of Edinburgh had a fleet of 15 coaches

KEY POINTS

- Former driver told VOSA Browns had used ghost names on tacho charts
- 957 tacho charts covering three months found 20% of fleet mileage was missing
- TC Joan Aitken concluded that ghosting was going on and operator knew about it
- Alistair Brown and Browns of Edinburgh are banned for four years

The traffic examiners were suspicious that the missing charts represented something that was wrong, and gave examples of a journey where the handwriting on a driver's chart did not appear to match the specimen of a chart written by him at a later interview, and another journey where a driver's handwriting appeared to be different to others in his name and similar to that of other agency drivers' charts.

The traffic examiners found that quite a number of charts for some drivers appeared to be in similar handwriting, and they subsequently interviewed these part time or agency drivers. Part time driver Mr David Millar was shown the charts and denied that these were his. He was able to show that he was driving in Wales on the date and time that he was shown on a Browns coach in the Lake District on a chart produced by Browns. There were also other charts which he produced in conflict of those produced by Browns. Six other charts produced by Browns in David Millar's name appear not to be in the same handwriting as that of driver Mr Millar's Welsh chart but similar to others named as agency drivers. Specimen charts filled out by other drivers also showed that particular charts were not in their handwriting and were not true records of their driving.

Part time driver Mr David Thomson indicated that he had worked for Browns permanently between 2002 and 2005 and prior to that part time. However, he had not carried out any duties for Browns during 2006. He had been out of the country until 12 July 2006 and his wife who accompanied him was able to show her passport with the visa entry stamp of that date. He was shown a chart in his name dated 9 July 2006 starting a journey at Stratford and ending at Leicester. He denied that was a record of his work and the only work he had done for Browns since his return to Britain was a 10 day ski trip in January 2007.

There were 7 other drivers for whom Browns could not give the traffic examiners copies of driver licences or dates of birth and so these men could not be identified. Many of their charts appeared to have been completed in the same or similar handwriting as some of the others. During the investigation, the examiners had communications from Ronald and Rhona Brown so had seen their handwriting. The handwriting on many of these charts appeared to have similarities to specimen charts written out by Rhona Brown.

"Daily and weekly rest periods could not be accurately calculated because either charts were missing or information was not supplied from other sources. The offences found in the analysis tended to be minor insufficient daily rest and driving break offences but because of the missing charts, ghost driving and unavailable work and other records, no accurate analysis could be made to determine the scale and severity of driving hours offences."

The traffic examiners concluded that Mrs Brown had admitted to writing on charts but only when entries had been missed by the drivers. "Her handwriting on various productions bears strong similarities to the suspect charts. The charts that have Harthill services entries on them had been written by someone with little knowledge of tour locations or charts. Drivers were surprised when they saw those charts, which tend to show that the charts were not completed by them or by someone who knew the routes. Mrs Brown admitted that the text message came from the office mobile phone but would not admit who sent it."

> ALISTAIR MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT GHOSTING WAS GOING ON. TOO MANY PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED FOR HIM NOT TO

"The missing mileage and lack of other records made an accurate assessment of drivers' hours impossible. However, the allegation of ghost driving was proved in at least 8 cases. The handwriting on these charts compared to others led to the Examiners believing that the use of ghost drivers was more widespread but would only be known to those involved. The use of ghost drivers must mean that when the driving took place, the actual driver broke the drivers' hours and rest rules."

Giving evidence Ronald Brown confirmed that he was employed as a manager with the business and had no financial interest in it. He, his wife Rhona and their son Alastair are all full time. In the period April to June 2006, the period covered by the investigation, he was in the office dealing with drivers on a day to day business and it was predominantly he who instructed the drivers. His father played very little part and the operational side was delegated to him and his wife Rhona.

He was asked if certain drivers brought vehicles back to Broxburn and he answered that he presumed so, because they were under pressure and had commitments, and had been let down on a few occasions and this is how it had arisen. With hindsight they should never have got there. It was very foolish and he was under extreme pressure in the company and his relationship with his father and other things - very stupid. It was essential that the vehicles be back at Broxburn and drivers brought them back. He was asked if it was him, his wife or a third party who put in the name of the driver and admitted that it was him or his wife Rhona, but she acted under his instructions and he was not blaming her. It was done to cover up drivers' hours offending, but it was a difficult time and they colluded with drivers to bring the coaches home to Broxburn.

Licence holder Alastair Brown is the sole proprietor and said that he concentrated on the maintenance side, delegated the operational side and therefore took his eye off the ball. His intention had been to sack his son and daughter-in-law but his wife talked him out of it. His son and daughter-in-law are employees ›

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PUBLIC INQUIRY **BROWNS OF EDINBURGH**

It was found bogus names were entered as driver's drove vehicles back North outside their leagl hours

with no financial interest in the business, and there was no financial gain to go to the length of filling in the charts. They needed their coaches back to base but that should not have happened, and he appreciated there had been a danger to the drivers and to other road users.

Summing up, Ms Aitken said that Ronald Brown had been open and honest and admitted the false records and admitted responsibility for his wife under his instructions. Alastair Brown had delegated to his son and daughter-in-law and at that time was not exercising his role as Transport Manager. He was content to leave matters to his son, and he should have paid more attention and took the eye off the ball. "There is no substantive evidence that Alastair Brown knew that false records were being completed, but he did not have proper control of the systems and had he made investigations and questions, that would have revealed suspicions and concerns. There is no option but to concede that Alastair Brown failed in his duties as Transport Manager."

In delivering her verdict, Ms Aitken said that after a diligent, persistent and time consuming enquiry and investigation, including a significant number of interviews, including interviews with innocent drivers whose names had been used by others, the traffic examiners uncovered drivers' hours offences and falsification. "I accept the examiners' evidence contained in their report and supported by the productions in the appendices as fact. The reason for the resistance of the operator and his employees in the form of his son and daughter-in-law to the investigation became evident. Not only were ghost drivers being used but proper payroll and tax and national insurance records were not being kept. Drivers were being hired and used in the black economy with cash in brown envelopes passing or being retained."

"I find as fact that the purported agency arrangement with a Mr Stewart was by 2006 an entirely fictitious arrangement and was referred to by the operator's son and daughter-in-law to create a false trail and to hide the true picture of hiring and deployment of drivers. I find as fact that both Ronald Brown and Rhona Brown falsified tachograph charts and used drivers' names fraudulently and dishonestly. Not only did Mr Ronald Brown engage in this behaviour of instigating ghosting and gross breaches of the drivers' hours rules and disregard of the Working Time Directive, all as narrated in the report, but he also directly participated in the ghost driving, including using his own father's name in that regard."

> THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS CASES THAT CAN COME BEFORE A TC. THIS OPERATOR HAS GROSSLY OFFENDED

"I find that Alastair Brown was not undertaking the role of Transport Manager as expected by law, that is to be someone who either alone or jointly with one or more other persons has continuous and effective responsibility for the management of the road passenger transport operations of the business. I find that he supervised the maintenance side of the business but did not have supervisory control over the operation of the business."

"I find that the matters detected by the traffic examiners were not isolated incidents but represent an ongoing course of conduct which will have predated the examiners' visit and which would have continued but for the examiners' investigation. I find that at the heart of this operation, there was a pattern of wilful and criminal flaunting of the drivers' hours and tachograph rules and the requirement to keep proper records. I find that there was no credible effort to comply with the Working Time Directive and to keep the records required by that Directive. I find that the practice would have continued indefinitely given the pressure to work the vehicles and maximise the return on capital."

"I find on the balance of probabilities that Alastair Brown must have known that ghosting was going on. Too many people were involved in it for him not to have known and it was his business decision that the vehicles had to be worked hard to get the financial return from them. I find that there has been a breach of the licence undertakings. In this current case, the true picture cannot be determined for 5% of the mileage is missing but what has been established in fact is that there was a pattern of using ghost drivers names to get the vehicles North at the end of tours."

"This is a very serious case in which road safety has been imperilled by allowing those drivers to continue north when they had no available hours. The perpetrators of the falsification remain at the heart of this business and were described by the operator as being good at what they do - the rotten apples remain in place, excused apparently by family ties. They say they are sorry and will never do it again, never be before me again, which cynically I could view as the standard refrain of the miscreant who has been caught."

"This one of the most serious cases that can come before a traffic commissioner for the use of ghost drivers, missing mileage, drivers' hours offences, strikes at the very heart of the regulatory regime which is there to promote and protect road safety and fair competition.

"This operator has grossly offended against both road safety and fair competition. The drivers' hours provisions are there to make sure that drivers do not fall asleep at the wheel and there is a true risk that this would have happened to Browns' drivers given the pattern of driving. Fair competition is also of critical importance for this operator will have taken work from others.

"Compliance comes at a price and this operator has chosen to maximise his financial advantage by the pattern of conduct within his business which allowed for the repeated falsification of tachograph charts and disregard of the drivers' hours provision and indeed the Working Time Directive provision."

"I find that Alastair Brown has lost his repute both as operator and as transport manager, and I now turn to the matter of disqualification. This is a case in which it is appropriate that I disqualify Alastair Brown, because of the seriousness of the matters under consideration. I cannot disqualify him for less than three years for that would be to undermine the regulatory purposes, so I shall make the period four years albeit with some hesitation, for a longer period could also be justified."

Tick, Tock, Tacho

Are over-detailed rules turning drivers into clock-watchers?

The man was purple with frustration. "This is ridiculous! I've done nothing for nearly an hour, but because I moved the vehicle across the street, you're telling me I can't drive for another half an hour?"

This was the complaint I was met with by one of the drivers at a company where I act as transport manager. His great crime was that, after being on Break for 25 minutes, he'd re-positioned his vehicle to avoid some congestion in the yard, and had then resumed his break - but then brought the motor back again 25 minutes later. He had clocked up 50 minutes worth of break with the briefest of interruptions, but that was enough to prevent him from setting off again until he had completed an uninterrupted 30 minutes, being the second half of a split break. That the first part had exceeded the required 15 minutes by ten minutes was no excuse.

Although it is now over a year since the amended drivers' hours rules came into force, some of the implications are only now filtering through, and drivers - and even some transport managers - still find them confusing and irksome.

I know of a driver who was actually prosecuted because he got his split break the wrong way round - he'd had half an hour, then later, 15 minutes - and fell foul of a policeman who had, he proudly told the driver, "been on a course about this" and was clearly keen to use his new knowledge.

These incidents came to mind when I was co-driving a tour recently. The double-manned journey to Switzerland could have been comfortably accomplished within our duty time, were it not for passengers dawdling at stops, an extended wait for a ferry, and the service at a meal stop being slower than the M25. The cumulative effect of this was that when we reached the outskirts of our destination we were technically "out of hours".

Were we to park up in a lay-by with our passengers for nine hours? Of course not; we deliberately exceeded our hours in order to reach a safe and suitable stopping place - our hotel, where we would be stationary for the next four days.

I do not believe that safety was in the slightest bit compromised by this decision, but I don't think that the last few hundred kilometres were completed by relaxed, stress-free drivers. How conducive is it to road safety to put drivers under the stress of trying to beat the clock in order to stay technically legal?

It is an interesting development that, whereas the general trend in legislation is to remove over-prescriptive laws and make regulation a 'light touch', drivers' hours rules are moving the other way. We've already seen the old highly detailed Factories Acts abolished in favour of the Health and Safety at Work Act, where employers are now just asked to assess risks and do something 'reasonable and practicable' about them. Then a couple of years ago, fire safety was taken out of the hands of the fire service with their task of issuing fire certificates, and responsibility now rests with companies to take "adequate" steps in fire precautions.

> HOW CONDUCIVE IS IT TO ROAD SAFETY TO PUT DRIVERS UNDER THE STRESS OF TRYING TO BEAT THE CLOCK

Of course, the onus is still on companies to demonstrate that they have done the right things, but at least the over arching legislation is loosely framed, and businesses can implement specific actions flexibly.

If the same principles were to apply to drivers' hours, then perhaps we would have a law that simply stated that employers would have a duty to ensure that drivers were properly rested before starting work and had suitable breaks. Doubtless, VOSA would offer some recommendations as to what would be regarded as "suitable", and a convention of custom and practice would be established that would provide a standard against which operators could be judged.

Richard Charnley runs If It Moves, a travel, logistics and transport management services consultancy based in Leamington Spa. He can be contacted on 01926 88 8283. *ric.charnley@btinternet.com*

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to: CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Forder Way, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8GX

Much the same has happened regarding maintenance. All that an O Licence requires is that vehicles be kept "fit and serviceable". There is no law that says vehicles should be inspected at six weekly intervals - this has been adopted as a convention, and some operators (like off-road tipper companies) have opted for four weeks while others with light usage go for eight weeks.

Why a driver is deemed to be properly rested if he takes 15 minutes break followed later by 30 minutes, but not if he does it the other way round, I cannot understand. The only time the old rule could seem to be abused would be if a driver drove for (say) five minutes then took a thirty minute break. He could then drive for 4 hours 25 minutes, have the 15 minutes to complete his split break then, having wiped the slate clean, do another four and a half hours driving. In effect he could drive for nearly nine hours with only a quarter hour break: quite legal, but surely not in the spirit of the law.

Admittedly, under the latest rules the second break does have to be half an hour, but is this really adequate in almost nine hours continuous driving? And if this slight improvement is the reason for the change, then it's created far more problems for more drivers on a day-to-day basis than hindered the occasional opportunist at the extreme end of the scale.

I read recently of a minibus operator who only does school contacts during the week and relies on weekend private hire: he now has to give his drivers weekends off although they may have only done 20 hours work during the week. Yet another example of how over detailed and highly prescriptive legislation is affecting the viability of sectors of the industry.

Sensible and responsible operators and drivers recognise and welcome a curb on excessive hours, but when specified in such minute detail as we now have, the driver and operator are potentially so distracted with trying to ensure that they are compliant that - perversely - safety may be compromised.

The future's bright

In an uncertain climate, *CBW* catches up with leading vehicle supplier Dawsonrentals bus and coach who says 2008 is shaping up to be a great year for the industry.

Having just opened a Northern base for its selling arm, Ventura Bus and Coach Sales, Dawsonrentals bus and coach is continuing to expand where many others are looking to ride out the storm. It is part of Dawsongroup plc, a company that has over 70 years of transport experience and is supported by 36 locations throughout the UK. Its core business is high value asset rental with the complementary provision of used equipment sales.

The group's portfolio of close to 20,000 hire fleet vehicles is focused on high quality, premium products. All are managed through separate trading divisions, of which truck and trailer remains the largest although impressive growth has been achieved in the bus and coach sector.

In the last 12 months, Dawsonrentals bus and coach has spent heavily, investing in its product base. Paul Sainthouse, Dawsonrentals Managing Director says. "The investment has paid dividends, I think customers are recognising we're providing good quality products."

Established in 1994, Dawsonrentals bus and coach has proved to be nothing short of a major success story and now accounts for over 20% of the group revenue.

Each year sees substantial capital investment in new equipment to ensure high quality vehicles are always available to customers. A comprehensive menu of services is provided including full maintenance, breakdown cover, tyre wear, road fund licence, plain livery and delivery/collection. A full range of financial packages is available to suit every funding need.

The client base includes many of the extremely high profile organisations including the major bus groups, TfL operating companies, the main UK airports and their contractors, local authorities, the Armed Forces, provincial bus companies and coach tour operators.

Dawsonrentals has grown year on year for almost all of its 14-year history and despite a seemingly ever-growing list of threats facing their clients, Paul says there is an air of optimism among bus and coach operators. "Despite the marketplace talking itself down, we've seen a great level of optimism in the industry. 2008 will be a good year for the suppliers. Last year a number of people were pessimistic about the state of the market. The tourist market and the cost of fuel especially were concerns. There seemed to be a lot of dissatisfaction around, but the turnaround has been remarkable."

Demand too high, supply too low

Europe is experiencing a surge in demand at the moment, especially for the large bus products. "Just like an operator, we'll cascade aging vehicles down the fleet," says Paul. "Any of our assets are available for sale. On the coach side we find the Volvo B12B/Plaxton products to be acceptable to the greatest number of operators, but we can get anything, be it buses, coaches or smaller vehicles. At the moment the coach industry is reasonably buoyant and the bus market is very, very buoyant. Demand from our point of view is good."

But, with this comes issues of keeping up with demand. Production issues among some of the European chassis makers have compounded matters and lead times are rising, but this too could fall into the hands of Dawsonrentals. "We like to be in a position to leapfrog the lead times with a large stock," explains Paul. "At any one time in Dawsonrentals, we would expect to have up to 200 vehicles ready and waiting for sale or hire."

Above: Dawsonrentals bus and coach MD Paul Sainthouse outside the Milton Keynes HQ; right: A significant part of the Oxford Tube fleet was supplied through Dawsonrentals

And that 200 covers a broad range of makes and models. A glance round the yard in Milton Keynes tells you if you have a specific model in mind, Dawsons won't struggle to source it for you. "We offer virtually every kind of PCV," says Paul. "You name it, we've got it."

But it's not just products that Dawson specialises in, the range of services provided extend beyond any other comparable supplier in the industry.

A one stop shop

Paul joined when Dawsonrentals was

a truck and trailor hire company, but moved over to PCVs 13 years ago. Since then, with six dedicated locations for the bus and coach business, the division has embarked on its goal of becoming a one stop shop for anyone looking to procure a vehicle.

Dawsonrentals has joined forces with LHE Finance to offer finance as a vehicle is being sourced. LHE Finance is an established finance broker and lease arranger within the asset finance industry. They deal with a wide range of businesses in all industry sectors.

LHE has a significant number of relationships with funders, many of which only deal through brokers and intermediaries. The depth of funding relationships means they can support many types of assets and client objectives.

Typically, facilities arranged include: operating lease, structured hire purchase, hire purchase, invoice discounting and factoring, structured lease, lease purchase and loans.

As well as financial expertise, Dawsonrentals has the understanding of its markets to give it the edge over competitors when it comes to funding

> WE CAN TAILOR FULLY-SUPPORTED CONTRACTS, WHICH ARE GROWING IN POPULARITY

and providing new vehicles. "Lots of companies offer lots of different elements of what we do, but no one covers all our activities," Paul declares. "We can tailor fully-supported contracts, which are growing in popularity. Or there's maintenance hire, where an operator takes a vehicle, treats it as his own and just returns it at the end of the deal." Indeed, there is an option at Dawsonrentals for every set of circumstances.

■ **CONTRACT HIRE** A fully supported long-term rental agreement, where the equipment is funded off the balance sheet and is 'used' rather than 'owned'. The package can include a range of service options including routine maintenance, tyre replacement, roadside assistance and road fund ›

licence.

■ **SHORT-TERM HIRE** Short-term rental agreement, generally less than 12 months. Again the package can include a range of service options including routine maintenance, tyre replacement, roadside assistance and road fund licence.

■ **OPERATING LEASE** An operating lease, also known as non-maintenance hire, is an off balance sheet finance package which generally excludes the provision of routine maintenance, and is treated by the lessee as their own whilst in their custody, but in which they have no residual value risk. At the end of the agreement, they simply hand the vehicle back.

■ **RENT TO BUY** Rent to Buy provides you with all of the benefits of rental, with an ownership option upon completion of the primary rental term.

■ **USED SALES** Dawsonrentals has access to a large fleet of ex-rental and major operator equipment for sale. Whatever age or specification of vehicle you require, Dawsonrentals has an impressive range on offer for sale.

Another key service offered by Dawsonrentals is its bus delivery trailer. A unique service in vehicle delivery, the trailer allows for optimum delivery conditions, keeping your new vehicle clean and without putting miles on the clock.

From small independents to the multinational, multi-depot fleet operators, Dawsonrentals can find, supply, finance and even maintain the vehicle you need.

Mirroring the truck market

With extensive experience in both the truck and bus and coach industries, Paul is well placed to comment on the differences and similarities between the two. "The bus industry is catching up with the trucks now," he professes. "In terms of products, volumes are huge and prices are reasonably stable. Most truck manufacturers don't build bad products now, so operators are looking to buy on price.

"The bus and coach industry has caught up with the HGVs phenomenally. Products are much

Left: Some of the fleet being prepared for dispatch; above: Dawsonrentals show vehicle; right: Solos feature in the smaller bus fleet; below: the bus delivery trailer gets vehicles to you in optimum condition

Left: Some of Diamond's fleet which recently reached the end of its contract; below: An '08 Cheetah joined the fleet last week

more reliable than they were, but the big difference now is in the way people choose to acquire vehicles. The vast majority of trucks you see on the roads are all leased - you buy a tool for a job with limited risk. Bus and coach operators are moving more in that direction. I think people are realising their core activity isn't owning and maintaining vehicles, it's transporting people. You don't need to own a vehicle and spend all the time and money associated with keeping it roadworthy to run it."

Put in plain English, it seems a convincing argument. Everyone would like to look out from the office over a yard of shiny new coaches, all paid for outright, but then as few assets depreciate as fast and fiercely as vehicles, it becomes an expensive collection. Also, of course, the carriage in Tesco's lorry won't complain about a lack of leg room, your passengers may if you start buying on price.

"We're finding that while the bus industry grows, a higher percentage of people are looking for fully-supported contracts," Paul continues. "The cost and management times in running a workshop are high. Investment needed in a workshop is significant. Modern technology and legislation means this investment is growing year on year, so people have to question if adding another vehicle to the workshop rota is viable, or if passing the responsibilities on to someone else makes life easier. With a fully supported contract, all you need is a driver and fuel. We take care of the rest."

> NOW IS THE TIME TO GROW AGAIN AND CONTINUE TO FIND AND SUPPORT MORE AND MORE CUSTOMERS

Good times

As you would expect, Paul and his team have very close relationships with all the manufacturers and while keeping his cards close to his chest, *CBW* understands Dawsongroup had a meeting with a partner just this past week to discuss the possibility of the introduction of a completely new environmentally-friendly vehicle.

"Not a day goes by when I don't speak to manufacturers," Paul added. On the subject of the future for the Dawsongroup over the next 12 to 18 months, he continued: "We're looking to get the pedal down now, with more organic growth. Over the last two or three years, we tightened the business up and worked with our existing assets. Now is the time to grow again and continue to find and support more and more customers.

"We already procure and supply market-leading products, so we'll continue to do that. We've just opened a new facility at Olney, near Milton Keynes, to be used for preparation and handover of vehicles. We're just about to get our teeth stuck into Rotherham (the new Ventura Northern sales base) and that will be operating in the same area as the Dawsonrentals depot there. So there is a lot going on."

And if Paul and his team's confidence and optimism are anything to go by, there should be a lot going on throughout the industry. Certainly, it seems the silver lining of legislation means it keeps the industry consuming to keep ahead. With the issues of congestion and fuel prices looking like they aren't going to slow down any time soon, new customers are being pushed into the arms of the bus industry.

And new customers will need new vehicles. With all specifications, sizes, makes and models, a comprehensive range of finance options and the opportunity to let someone else pay for the running, while you deal with the service, Dawsonrentals should be close to the top of anyone's list of where to look for them.

■ Dawsonrentals can be contacted on 01908 218111. A selection of vehicles and services are outlined on *www.dawsongroup.co.uk/busandcoach.*

DARWEN GROUP

The Evolution Continues

In less than a year Darwen Group Chief Executive Andrew Brian has acquired East Lancashire coachbuilders, floated on AIM and is now involved in the reverse takeover of Jamesstan Investments newly-acquired Optare. Heady stuff. Andy Sutcliffe heads to Blackburn to talk deals, hybrids and plans...

Talking to Darwen Group's Andrew Brian at last year's Coach and Bus Live exhibition it was clear that he had plans for the company that went way beyond simply re-establishing East Lancashire Coachbuilders, the well-known bus manufacturer north eastern entrepreneur Roy Stanley had acquired from receivership in August 2007.

Already there was a new logo, new brochures, bright red staff polo shirts and, in Mr Brian at least, a real buzz about the company. However, having spent my career in the world of marketing and media, I was well aware that, impressive as it might all look, a new logo and some smart corporate brochures does not in itself prove anything.

The collapse of East Lancs had left plenty of companies - suppliers and customers alike - hurting badly. And even in October, at the show, some two months after the arrival of Messrs Stanley and Brian, you didn't have to ask around much to hear stories of suppliers and customers sitting on the fence, the industry jury being very firmly still out on the Darwen/East Lancs revival.

And then the story began to move on apace. Leyland Product Development (now known as Darwen LPD) was acquired in November, bringing its extensive chassis expertise into the Blackburn fold. A restructuring at the East Lancs factory saw the workforce shrink from around 350 to 250, alongside the announcement of a search for new premises in the area. Then, in late February, Darwen Holdings began trading on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) of London's Stock Exchange. Although no money was raised in the flotation, and overall control remains with Roy Stanley, the listing signalled that the company was both raising its profile, as Mr Brian admitted at the time, and positioning itself to quickly raise money should it choose, as it pursued its stated aim of establishing itself as a leading vehicle manufacturer.

> WE GOT INVOLVED IN EAST LANCS TO SAVE THE BUSINESS. WE WERE NOT THE CAUSE OF ITS DEMISE

The flotation stories had barely dried on the page, when the industry was awash with rumours about the further ambitions of Mr Stanley. Chairman of zero emission vehicle specialists Tanfield/Smith Electric Vehicles, his name, and that of Mr Brian and Darwen was being linked with Leeds-based Optare. No one at Darwen would - in the best traditions - either confirm or deny the rumours until, as had now been very well telegraphed, the story broke on March 12. Optare had been acquired by Jamesstan Holdings, a company controlled by Roy Stanley.

Since then, the story has continued to move on. Darwen's shares are now suspended on AIM as the company attempts a reverse takeover of Optare, seemingly bringing together Optare, Darwen East Lancs, and Darwen LPD into one single AIM-listed entity.

With hindsight it's a very neat set of events. An important group to the UK (and world) bus and coach industry is in the process of being formed. A group with world-class manufacturing and product development expertise. And a group with access to cutting edge zero-emission technology through chairman Roy Stanley. More prosaically, Darwen acquires brands - in Optare and Unitec - with real brand equity in the marketplace. And both former entities, seemingly, gain the leadership of a vehicle entrepreneur with vision, ambition and the ability to raise cold hard cash.

Heading up to Darwen's Blackburn HQ last week, it would be fair to say that on the face of it not much has changed. Chassis still surround the entrance gates as you drop down into the visitors' parking area, and the reception area still hardly shouts World Class Low Emisison Bus Manufacturer. But then the company has made it clear it has invested in product development and production and training and staff, not in tarting up a factory it is clearly itching to vacate.

The company has reportedly earmarked a new site for its planned relocation, just a junction down on the M65 that serves as a sort of Blackburn half ringroad. However, I don't think you'd have to be a top notch soothsayer to surmise that whatever plans there were to move Darwen/East Lancs within the Blackburn area prior to the announcement of the reverse takeover, they may now be somewhat delayed or indeed being rethought.

So, for the time being at least, the Darwen Group (and Darwen LPD) operates out of the old East Lancashire factory. And Optare operates mainly out of its aging Charles Roe factory in Leeds, subject itself to endless rumours of the have they or haven't they got planning permission for housing type.

Sitting down with Andrew Brian and Commercial Director Mark Houlton it's clear that they are hugely excited by the position they find themselves in. Having quickly established that they're not going to gloss over the rumoured supplier/customer difficulties they encountered when the East Lancashire business was first rescued from receivership, I couldn't help but wonder how much of the last 8-9 months events had been some sort of master plan, it certainly seems very logical and predictable, albeit in retrospect...

Andy Sutcliffe: Tell me about the past nine months. Has it been as smooth as it sometimes looks from the outside?

Andrew Brian: We have set up a great deal of what we set out to do. Of our post acquisition plan, we are about ¾ way

Darwen's Andrew Brian with one of the company's new service vans

though that. And it's now in the public domain that we are in the throws of completing the reversal on Optare. We are working towards a deadline of early June to see that complete. It forms part of the strategic plan that we set out in August, with one of the players other than new technologies; it's an opportunity to consolidate with them.

And if you look at the targets, and product portfolio, and what we are doing, it was an obvious opportunity. I am not sure if people have quite realized yet exactly what it gives us in terms of a complementary range of products which are possibly the most extensive within the industry and UK manufacturing. I think that puts us in an extremely strong position.

Particularly given that we have access to zero emission technologies which will be put into the market at the back end of the year [to coincide with Euro Bus Expo] as well as low emission with hybrid.

AS: So we can expect zero emission and low emission vehicles at EBE?

AB: Yes. But I'm also mindful that a lot of our message has been around hybrid but there is still a robust future for the conventional technologies with the next generation of diesels. These guys are not going to roll over and just die. It's a multi-billion pound business and they are doing some really exciting things and we will hopefully be part of that as well.

We have got small bus to big bus to biggest bus. We have low emission, zero emission, conventional technology and some of the best people in the business in terms of the acquisitions we have made. We have got route to market with existing major operators as well as independents and very strong reputations in both sectors. Which is a clear divide in terms of the way the industry operates. We are very well placed with people like TFL - both with the activities of Optare and of Darwen. So it's a positive future.

AS: As you're aware there's a lot of speculation around about how you will develop next. Basically you've two locations and two brands. How far down the road are you in your thinking as to how it will develop?

AB: Taking the brand issue first of all. Darwen Holdings has a level of recognition within the city as a vehicle relating to activities on the stock exchange, it suits our needs. On the basis of the deal [the proposed reversal] completing we have a number of brands in there and Darwen is only of them, that we use as a trading company to date. But I think it would be fair to say we see a significant level of brand equity in Optare. And equally, to a slightly lesser degree in terms of those that we deal with, Unitec in terms of the aftersales. It's extremely well recognised. Wherever we have got an asset, we will endeavour to leverage it.

Mark Houlton: I think it's a case of building on the strengths of the Optare brand and moving it into the broad area of the product offer we will be offering in the future.

AS: And location?

AB: There is an existing site. We are in the later stages of finalising to relocate. It's certainly been pushed out by some of the projects we had on the go... I have just had a meeting about it and we anticipate the conclusion of the relocation of this business in the last quarter of this year, and then obviously we are looking at the future for [Optare's] Leeds and Rotherham facilities, that will be done in due course. Jamesstan Investments has taken a short-term lease on the Leeds manufacturing facility, so there is an expectation that will be relocated and people are aware of that, and on the basis we do acquire the business we would make that decision further down the line. There is not really a great deal more we can say about that now.

AS: Specifically on East Lancs. How difficult has it been to re-establish the brand? To get over the uncertainties in the market following the August rescue?

AB: We have spent a lot of time and effort to making people aware that we got involved to save the business. We were not the cause of its demise, in the case of East Lancs - quite the contrary. We have invested a huge amount of time, effort and cash to get to where we are today. I think there is an awareness that we are genuinely trying to do our best for the good of the company, our customers, the people we employ. It's always been our intention to do that, never anything else. It's very difficult to get the message across to the industry. On a practical level, we have had enquiries for products that ›

DARWEN GROUP

are 10+ years old that still require some level of support, and supposed warranty, and we have stood up to the challenge in pretty much every case. To maintain a level of goodwill in the market, we are going to have to do this stuff, and it has caused us a certain amount of pain, because it has cost us a significant amount of money to do it, but we went into it open eyed and we were always going to have to do it.

We are creatures of habit, and with new people on the block, people are mindful. But I think with the breaking news surrounding the Optare reversal, it is having a tendency to change, and people are seeing us as long term players, we are going to be around talking about and delivering the new technologies.

AS: You must be aware there remains speculation about further acquisition, specifically on the technology side. With the Group's name being linked to Traction Technology on many small investor web-sites for example. How do you see your relationships with new technology partners developing?

AB: Specifically with Traction Technology, we have no plans at this time to see that deal through. There is an ongoing relationship between Optare and Traction Technology. It's not the only one. We are also working with Siemens, ISE, Enova, also some of the major engine suppliers. Again, going back to the point we previously alluded to, we probably won't invest in specialist areas and bring those into the fold. We see ourselves more as an integrator, where we leave the parties to do what they do best, which is battery systems, drive systems, motors and so forth. I think the really successful players will ensure that the integration of those systems is honed and delivered in a commercial way that works for the end user. I guess it's just sticking to what we do best.

MH: Optare has given us the opportunity to evaluate other technology which may be more appropriate for different vehicle applications. I don't think there is a 'one size fits all' series hybrid. There will be combinations, niche operation that better suite one technology than another.

AS: This integrator point is important. You very much see yourselves looking worldwide for the best solutions to specific problems?

MH: Yes. There will be some partners who will be better equipped to developing parallel hybrid drivelines because they are developing it for their trucks and coaches, and it might well suit us to use one of those. At this point in time there is a lot of competition in hybrids, or a lot of competitiveness in who's going to bring the right hybrid, parallel hybrid, series hybrid, into the market. We are keeping our options open in terms of choosing the appropriate one. It wants to be market led as well as product led...

AB: Absolutely, and it's an interesting point Mark has made, it's all about market pull. We don't want to get involved with sexy new technology that just goes out there for the sake of going out there. The market pull is people want to buy buses with a total life cycle cost that is reduced by comparison to what it is today. The issue surrounding environmental friendly technologies is frankly secondary to that. As it so happens we are able to provide solutions that meet criteria number one and is also environmentally friendlier. So by definition we tick two of the boxes. It's really about commercial solutions, so we are not talking about technologies that are 6, 8, 10 years out there, such as fuel cells, we have got to talk about things that can be delivered next month, next year.

> IT'S LARGELY THANKS TO TFL THAT THERE IS ACCEPTANCE OF TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS HYBRIDS

AS: And that means hybrids?

AB: Yes. Other things are further off. And they need to be, certainly in terms of any level of adoption - and credit to TfL, it's largely thanks to them that there's the acceptance in terms of incoming new technologies such as hybrids. The issues of quality, delivery, price will be the factors that come into play, not just the fact that you've got something new and different. That's nice to talk about, but people don't write big cheques for it.

MH: We recognise that the TfL have given us the opportunity to prove that the technology, the hybrid, is going to work, or is not going to work, on a commercial basis. It's the kind of scale and the kind of commitment that brings serious players into the market and that enable us to do it properly.

AB: It comes down to, again, the opportunity to do things properly. If you have got a product that is correctly designed, and configured for the market, and they understand how it should be use - the driver understands how it should be operated - then you have a potential to get it right. But there were so many things in terms of early hybrids coming into the market that were poorly developed, it wasn't necessarily the operators understanding that there was anything more complex with these vehicles compared to a conventional vehicle. Clearly there is, and simple things like misunderstanding signals and all of a sudden vehicles get a reputation for being out of service.

AS: So is the jury still out in terms of hybrids?

AB: No, I think it's moved on from that. I was in Washington last week with some government officials, there has been much talk of these various technologies there, LPG is an example, it has touched on the automotive industry but not really been adopted. Hybrids are an accepted technology in

Capacity at Darwen limits the manufacturer to six vehicles a week

the automotive industry now, and you typically find that when they get it right, and they buy into it, and invest in it, which in the case of Lexus, Toyota, Honda, etc, and others, is billions and billions of dollars, then naturally it tends to flow out and there is a buy into the technology from other sectors. The LPG thing never took off, it never really was adopted by the major manufacturers.

I look at the Lexus out there now [in the company car park. Mr Brian and his fellow directors drive Lexus hybrids] and I know it does what it says on the tin, it is a successful product.

AS: But are coach and bus operators as geared up as Lexus garages to deal with a hybrid product?

MH: Again, referencing the TfL contributions, their willingness to buy into the technology and support it financially is definitely assisted in the time to market and will continue to do so.

AB: Albeit that it has laid some pretty challenging targets for us, the commitment for all fleet replacements to be low emission by 2012 for example.

AS: It's getting near!

AB: In one way, it's music to our ears. I worked in the automotive industry when seatbelts where introduced to the rear of cars, and it was like winning the lottery, where you had legislation and regulatory approval on your side and you were conforming to those criteria, as a unique offering or one of a small number of players, then you are well placed to capitalise on that opportunity. I think that it's really important that we stay in the field of vision. I do think the day will come when central government, European, USA - if we move into that market - even at local authority level, if the mandate is there, which I think it will be, where a proportion of the fleet or 'x' number of vehicles have to conform to emerging technologies, or lower emissions. We have got to be ready to provide that solution. TfL have made that quite clear.

MH: And that vehicle, whatever its drive life must be ready for service 99.99 % of the time. You can't say: 'okay, we have a hybrid, but it's only running two days a week because the batteries are a bit imbalanced' or whatever....

AB: It's another reason the Optare acquisition is a good fit for us because they have such a well established after sales business in the form of Unitec. We can take that as a foundation and build on it in terms of supporting the product in the market.

AS: You mentioned visiting USA? Do you see exporting in the future? And is that helped by the various currency issues at the moment?

AB: Yes, it depends on whether we manufacture in the US, and that is certainly an opportunity that does present itself. $2 to the pound... it depends if you're buying or selling! But there is certainly huge opportunity, and speaking to the Republican representatives we spoke to in the States, they were convinced there would be a Democratic government or President in the not too distant future. And on the basis that it happens, there is lined up to be financial support for a whole host of initiatives for some of the legacy technology they have in the states - which is pig-iron with a 20 tonne diesel engine. Not very good!

AS: The UK government has been good in telling everyone what to do but not so forthcoming in offering incentives for the changes, would you like to see more help in that area.

AB: Yes. I think they tend to use negatives - it's all based on penalties. I think the adoption of these new technologies has to have a positive twist to it. Don't bash people over the head for doing what they have always done, give them a reason to do it another way. Not just because they are going to get battered again, and again. Would we like central government to do it or the European community? Absolutely. It would simply be a scaling up of what TfL have already been doing and it's got to be for the greater good from our position.

MH: It would be good to see central government put their money where their mouth is. They want the UK economy to become innovation lead - here is a field of technology where there is a unique opportunity of developing a very innovative product. The UK Economy plc can actually benefit from selling vehicles again overseas.

AB: Selling technology, licensing, whatever. The export and technology transfer opportunities will open up, and we will see the long term benefit on these shores as well so it would be a bit short-sighted not to do it. We are very good in this country at developing new products and bringing it to market.

AS: How do you see the market generally?

AB: Demand increasing. Slow in 2008, certainly we are pretty much closed off on that now on the basis of our order intake and delivery schedules to take us up to the end of the year.

AS: How many vehicles are you producing a week?

AB: At this facility, just over five.

AS: You were quoted somewhere as saying you would like about 10?

AB: We would like to, that will happen. We don't have the capacity here to do more than the six. We averaged 3.12 units in 2007. Since we acquired the business, with 130 less people, an improved supply chain, reduced inventory - we've cut that down by 45% - to get an additional 50% out the door. The build time for a double deck, for a standard unit, if there is such a thing, has come down from 1,400 hours to below 1,000. We have set some fairly tough targets in terms of where we want to be not too far down the line. We want to see a bus built in a week in 500 man hours.

BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL COACHES

Moseley's 1,500th Bova flies into BHX

CBW's Gareth Evans profiles Birmingham International Coaches, which has taken delivery of the 1,500th Bova supplied by Moseley, together with its associated Claribels bus operation

As one who spent his student years in Birmingham, something that always struck me regarding the local bus and coach 'scene' was the immaculate presentation of the Birmingham International Coaches (BIC) and Claribels fleets. Putting it bluntly, they certainly didn't appear to fall into the 'crabby little independent' category.

BIC and its associated bus operation Claribels are two separate companies, with two separate O-licences, but owned by the Watkiss family. Claribels operates three services commercially, the 94, 55 and 72, supplemented by contract work, while BIC concentrates solely on private and corporate work.

I first met brothers Andy, Nigel and Matthew last summer after I arranged to call by for a coffee to put some names to faces. Something that instantly became apparent was that it was a happy place to be in. Again putting it bluntly, in my experience, owing to the immense pressure that often goes with the job, happy workshop staff tend to be the exception rather than the rule in our industry. I liked the way the staff interacted and were on a similar wavelength to mine – they clearly enjoyed a spot of banter, but also knew when to get on with the work.

Therefore, I felt the recent arrival of their new flagship coach, which itself marks a significant milestone, provided the ideal opportunity to profile the Watkisses' PCV interests.

History

The Watkiss family's entry into the passenger transport business can trace its roots back to the 1970s.

"Our father, David, ran a fish and chip shop called the March Hare in Sheldon – it's a curry house nowadays," explained Andy. "Mum said one minute he'd be frying and next the phone would go and he'd be out on a taxi job. Put simply, margins were higher in taxis than they were in chips at the time!"

Named, Airport Private Hire, the taxi operation ran Rolls Royces and limousines.

At the time, Claribels was a small operation run by a gentleman named Ronnie Lee. However, Ronnie passed away in 1977.

"Dad was approached by the daughter of Ronnie Lee," continued Andy. "She came into our shop – she went to school with dad and wondered whether he wanted to take over the good will and the business."

"When I was a boy we were based at Bickenhill, near the airport and moved to the present depot in 1986," recalled Matthew. "That year father decided to start BIC. As a name Claribels sounds like a Welsh cow, while BIC sounds more flamboyant, as befitting of a coach firm."

"The buses are blue and white as we're Birmingham City fans," laughed Matthew. "I love it if we get a Villa fan as a driver!"

Like many others in the industry, Andy talks fondly about the Duple 425 coach. "Our first new coach was a Duple

Clockwise from left: The Birmingham Bovas; Representatives from BIC, Moseleys and VDL Bova at a special handover ceremony; The attractive rear end styling of the Futura is almost mirrored on the Magiq; The leather seats looks as comfortable as they are to sit in.

425 in 1987, followed by another 425 two years later. They were brilliant. Dad said if they'd continued to have made them, we'd have had a fleet of them. The Cummins L10 was a very, very good engine. Our 1989 example did over a million miles before we took out the engine to recondition it. We used it on intensive Spanish shuttle work at the time, testament in itself to the robustness of the 425."

"In 1989 we bid for a pair of Leyland Tiger Doyens and two Plaxton Paramount-bodied Tigers. The Doyens were only a couple of years old, while the Plaxtons dated from 1983. We had to bid on them - they were lined up at Yorkshire Traction and I recall they had West Riding branding on them. That was how our coach fleet progressed and it led to better quality vehicles."

The year 1991 marked another change in the firms. Claribels, which had concentrated on contract work, entered the local stagecarriage business.

"We got into buses in 1991," recalled Matthew. "We used to do a load of school contracts and we got undercut, as you do, so we decided to enter the local bus service business. We used to use conductresses on the coaches at first. A lot of the public loved it to be honest, but from our point of view, double manning wasn't cost effective."

"We upgraded from Caetano-bodied Ford R114 coaches with manual gearboxes to Plaxton-bodied semi-auto Leyland Leopards," continued Andy. "We bought them from a dealer and did them up. We had up to ten Leopards, and then in 1995, Walls of Manchester sold us five Optare Deltas. Being only five-years old on 1990 G-plates, they revolutionised our stage carriage business."

Another landmark was reached in 1995 when BIC acquired its first Bova.

"We bought our first Bova in 1995," recalled Matthew. "It was a Futura, registered M944XET. I don't know where it is now, but we've had this strong relationship with Moseleys ever since."

A further landmark was reached for Claribels in 1999 when the first brand new buses entered the fleet, according to Andy. "We bought nine Optare Excels. They were our first brand new service buses, representing an investment of almost a million pounds."

However, Claribels turned to Wright DAF Commanders in 2002.

"We bought our first Commanders as we fancied a change," explained Nigel. "We looked at various options, as you do, including the Mercedes Citaro, which is a lovely bus and also at a Scania, but in the end we chose the Wright/VDL combination. It offers better fuel economy and the design also benefits from rubber gasket glazing, which is a key consideration in an area like this, where smashed windows are a fact of life. Gasket glazing means a bus can be in and out within the hour. We keep our own stock of glass here and it saves the hassle of trimming and letting the new glass set that you get with bonded glazing."

> WE TRY TO PRIDE OURSELVES ON HAVING THE CLEANEST BUS & COACH FLEET IN THE AREA

"We ordered three initially," added Andy, "followed by a further two afterwards. A highlight for us was the display of our then new 53-plate example at the NEC show."

"We ordered another five in 2004," continued Matthew. "They replaced Optare Deltas and Excels. We're loyal to the Daf/VDL product, with 25 out of 31 vehicles across both fleets entirely or partly (chassis module) made by the Belgian manufacturer. Our philosophy is to ensure ease of maintenance."

"Plus the service and back up is excellent, and hence it's a case of 'why change'," said Nigel.

"Which is why we've also stuck with Bovas," added Matthew.

I couldn't resist mentioning the absence of a mini/medium-sized coach. ›

Operator Profile

BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL COACHES

"We no longer run any small coaches as there's too much competition from taxi operators these days," said Nigel.

"If we bought a small vehicle, we'd buy new because it's what we do, but we'd be spending £120k, whereas taxi firms can spend a fraction of that amount," added Matthew.

Sadly the brothers Father David Watkiss passed away in September 2001.

"It was very sudden," said Matthew. "I had people asking when we were going to sell up, but that would have been the last thing father would have wanted. It's obviously hit mum the hardest, but we're very close as a family. We'll go to each other's for Sunday lunch for example. Mum recently retired, aged 69, but she's always off on her holidays - I can't keep up with her. When she comes in here, she joins in with the banter, which is always good fun."

"The buses don't go out evenings and Sundays," continued Matthew. "I can cope with coaches being out, but not buses, with the hassle of smashed windows and abused drivers. In that respect, we're fortunate that our buses don't need to be out for more than twelve hours a day. "

"We don't run any holidays anymore either - we leave that to Johnsons and Bowens, although we are members of CPT, Coach Marque and the Coach Tourism Council."

Depot

Located among a complex of industrial units on Fortnum Close in Tile Cross, in the north east corner of the city, the depot provides a home for 31 buses and coaches.

"Our property is freehold so we've no worries about rent," explained Matthew, "which helps us to continue upgrading our fleet."

In addition to the single storey office block out the front, which represents the public face of both firms, the site also includes a well-equipped three-bay workshop and extensive stores. A fuelling bay occupies another corner of the concreted yard.

"We employ our own cleaners who come in every evening to clean every bus and do the coaches as required. All vehicles go through our own Kärcher vehicle wash - there's no excuse for dirty vehicles. If you're going to spend £130k on a bus, you don't want it looking tired after six months," laughed Matthew.

"Our current fleet size stands at 31 but further expansion is curtailed by the size of our present site. We could get a couple more vehicles in here but after that, that's it."

Fleet

The Watkiss family has opted to standardise largely on DAF/VDL running gear. Indeed, the most recent additions to the Claribels fleet is a pair of VDL SB200s, with Wrightbus Pulsar bodywork, supplied by Arriva.

Other buses in the fleet include a Plaxton Centro and a Caetano Nimbus, both of which are dedicated to contract work and are seat-belted as such, together with the remaining handful of Optare Excels.

The BIC fleet on the other hand is comprised solely of Bova products, mainly Futuras, supplemented by an 06 and 08 plate Magiq. The former carries a slightly different livery to the rest of the coach fleet.

"We decided at that time that we wanted our passengers to be able to distinguish it from our Futuras," said Andy, "hence why it's lighter. The vinyls are also different."

"The VDL/East Lancs Lowlander double-decker is undoubtedly my favourite vehicle here," smiled Matthew enthusiastically. "It's not used on service work and is dedicated to private hires and contract work, hence it's fitted with CCTV and seatbelts."

"Indeed, all our buses are equipped with all-round CCTV, while 80% of both fleets are fitted with tracking devices. It helps with monitoring bus reliability and on the coach side can be used to help create a smooth operation between

Clockwise from above: The contrasting identities of BIC and Claribels; The 06 plate Magiq; Ben Toon and Stuart Cleaver; The three brothers – Andy, Nigel and Matthew; A Wright Pulsar-bodied VDL on service 94 *(Photo: Ben Morrol).*

AT A GLANCE

Operator: Birmingham International/ Claribels

Fleet: 31

Staff: 55

Contact: Tel – 0121 7834004 *http://www.birmingham international coaches.co.uk/*

USEFUL CONTACTS

- Arriva Bus & Coach 01274 681144 *http://www. arrivabus andcoach.co.uk/*
- Moseley PCV 01977 609000 *http://www. moseley coachsales.co.uk/*
- Tachodisc 01925 283328 *http://www. tachodisc.co.uk/*

feeders for example," he continued.

Andy was equally positive about the benefits of CCTV: "It's been a godsend to us, particularly on the bus fleet. It helps no end to refute malicious claims - you can't dispute what's on camera."

Referring to the tracking devices on the coach fleet, Nigel said: "We had an incident recently at Alton Towers with a driver parked up having the engine and air-conditioning running. We called him about it - you can't afford that sort of thing with diesel now at £1.20 a litre."

"I'm a great believer in embracing technology," said Matthew. "If I could, I'd have live pictures on my office wall of buses in service."

I mentioned that I always noticed how clean both fleets looked.

"We try to pride ourselves on having the cleanest fleet in the area," said Matthew.

"I think it's about having pride in the job," added Andy. "Clean vehicles reflect well on us. We believe it's important to portray the right image. If we have accident damage, a scratched body panel for example, I like to have it in the workshop straight away - much to Matthew's annoyance, but I blame his drivers!"

"We're lucky to have such a low staff turnover, with several having been here twenty odd years," continued Matthew.

"Yes, we have a good laugh here," added Andy, and he's not wrong either.

Moseley's 1500th Bova

"It's a significant milestone for Moseleys - it's rare in this industry to have such a longstanding relationship between body builder and dealer," said Ben Worth of Moseley PCV. "The first Bova from Moseleys took to the road back in 1981 and we felt that BIC would be the ideal recipient for a high spec vehicle befitting such a landmark."

The coach itself is a 12.2 metre-long Magiq MHD 122-410. Fitted with a ZF As-Tronic gearbox, power comes from a DAF MX 300 S engine, generating 410BHP, and which meets Euro 5 emissions standards. Inside, the coach is fitted with 49 Kiel Avance 1010 luxury reclining, sideways adjustable seats, fully trimmed in platinum-style leather, which is complimented by carbon-effect trim. The comfort provided by the leather seats is instantly noticeable - they provide much needed support to the upper back/shoulder area. The black and grey colour scheme is pleasant on the eye and feels classy, while the leg room is also very comfortable. Indeed, it's nice and airy inside - it doesn't feel like a 12metre coach.

> I'M HAPPY WITH DIGITAL TACHOS. WE USE TACHODISC SOFTWARE, WHICH REMOVES THE HASSLE OF THE WTD

There are two fridges, one located in the front dashboard, while a smaller version can be found in the usual location above the off-side exit.

It is pleasing to report that the crew have not been forgotten either - all controls within easy reach, while the courier seat offers generous leg room.

Current issues

"The spiralling cost of fuel," is undoubtedly our greatest current issue said Matthew. "It's not so bad with private hires as you get your cash back instantly, but with contracts it's a different matter. The rates are more or less fixed."

"Did you know our fuel has gone up three pence a litre over the past week since our last delivery? It's shocking," added Andy.

I then asked how they had accepted the onset of digital tachographs. As perhaps by now would be expected, I was met with an enthusiastic response.

"I'm happy with them. We're fortunate to have the support of Tachodisc and their excellent software, which removes the hassle of calculating the working time directive implications. We also use Tachodisc for anologue tachos."

"We are however concerned about concessionary fares reimbursement," continued Matthew. "We currently get 69% here and there's a real risk this could fall, but at the end of the day, we're a small fish in a large sea."

Conclusion

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the Watkiss family. I can honestly say they always come across as genuine people. While they're not 'anoraks', they do benefit from a great passion for the job.

"We all enjoy it if we're honest," smiled Matthew. "We take the rough with the smooth and take pride in what we do."

"The drivers tell us they like it here as they say they're not just a number. We have a nice atmosphere and we like the staff to be part of it. You've got to have that contact with people," added Andy. "We'd rather have 30 quality vehicles that 50 older ones, but you know, it doesn't happen overnight."

CBW is indebted to the warm welcome by the Watkiss family.

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

HARDINGS

Arriva Bus & Coach has supplied two vehicles for Leger Holidays Silver Service coach standard. The two Van Hool Alizee-bodied VDLBus SB4000+PR delivered to Hardings of Redditch have the exacting specification, which is amongst the most comprehensive on a coach.

Silver Service encompasses 36 seats with additional legroom and a U-shaped lounge at the rear of the saloon where passengers can relax. Individual headsets will be provided so that users can tune into CDs or a DVD while an on-board satellite navigation system ensures that they are kept informed about the coach's progress, airline style.

Lounge seating for five people in the air-conditioned Alizee coachwork is in leather while the Royal Class reclining seats with Royal Grand Luxe headrests are in moquette with leather insets for both lumber and head support. Hot and cold drink making facilities feature, as does a centre sunken toilet, aircraft style locker doors and tinted double-glazed windows.

The chassis is the fuel efficient VDLBus SB4000+ PR Euro 5 with 360 bhp and a ZF 6 speed automatic gearbox.

Hardings International has been operating for almost 80 years through three generations of the family. They are members of the CPT and Coach Marque.

Recently, after more than three years of searching, a new site was acquired for the expanding firm in Oxleasow Road, within easy reach of the M42, M40, M5 and M6. The new premises have been purpose built on a 3-acre plot to a high specification under the close supervision of John Dyson, managing director of Hardings.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body VDL SB4000/ Van Hool Alizee
Engine DAF 360bhp Euro 5
Transmission ZF six speed auto
Seats 36
Spec Silver Service
Supplied by Arriva Bus & Coach 01274 681144

VOEL COACHES

Welsh operator, Voel Coaches Ltd. has just taken delivery of a new Volvo for 2008. The 9700 Prestige Plus will be used on the company's UK and European holiday programme.

While the majority of Voel's 34-strong fleet is Volvo, it is the first time they have opted for the 9700 and the reason is quite simple. "It's the product," explained MD Melvyn Kerfoot-Davies. "It fulfils all of our strict requirements as far as new coaches are concerned. Whilst having a very high spec we feel it represents excellent value and we are impressed by the fact that it's Volvo throughout."

He continued: "Reliability and support services are other major considerations when operating a busy fleet and by standardising vehicles it makes for ease of maintenance and servicing. We believe Volvo is the best supported passenger vehicle on the road today.

"We already had ten Volvo executive coaches, four of which feature the impressive I-Shift gearbox – another point in favour of the 9700. Having scrutinised the 9700 demonstrator, we were particularly impressed by the luxurious interior and especially the superior seat spacing configuration, this being a very important factor for passenger comfort.

All in all, we wanted to provide our loyal clientele with something new and different; we felt that the 9700 will ably suit all our requirements and so far it's living up to expectations."

The Volvo 9700's sleek exterior is matched by an interior designed to create an overall sense of comfort. Specified with 49 seats, the sloping theatre floor and large tinted side windows not only allow excellent visibility for passengers but generate the spacious feel throughout the vehicle.

The Volvo B12B chassis has been specified with Volvo's fuel-efficient DH12E and the latest generation of I-Shift. Not only that, the electronically regulated independent front air suspension and a stiff frame

ALFA TRAVEL

Alfa Travel has taken delivery of a further six Plaxton Paragons, bringing to 35 the number of Plaxtons in its fleet. The new coaches are air-conditioned 49-seaters on Volvo B12B chassis.

Alfa Travel has been running holiday coach tours since 1990, and established its own fleet in 1997. Since then it has gradually expanded the number of coaches it runs, and has now reached the point where around 50% of its departures are operated by its own vehicles and 50% by subcontracted coaches.

"I'm comfortable with this size of operation," says Alfa Travel's Neil McMurdy. "It works well for us. Our coaches are used almost exclusively on our own tours programme. We don't seek private hire work.

"This is the seventh consecutive year in which we have added Paragons to our fleet, and that continuity of our relationship with Plaxton demonstrates that we are very pleased with their products."

To make its drivers' lives as easy as possible, Alfa Travel standardised on automatic gearboxes right from the start of running

design combines to provide excellent ride comfort.

Based in the village of Dyserth, Denbighshire, North Wales, family run Voel Coaches, was established in 1949. In addition to its touring holidays, the company provides a range of travel provision including private hire, corporate and group travel and college and school services.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo 9700 prestige
Engine Volvo DH12E 460bhp
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 49
Spec tinted windows, air con, theatre-style floor
Supplied by Volvo Bus 01926 414518

its own coaches, and its new Volvos have I-Shift transmissions.

"As traffic conditions worsen we want to do what we can to lighten the driver's load," says Neil McMurdy, "and having an automatic gearbox means there is one less task for him to be concerned about.

"Overall, I think Plaxtons are pretty good now and they provide us with very few problems. We can get parts at the drop of a hat and they're quite well received by our passengers. They meet our three bills, which are reliability, at a good price and popular with passengers."

Alfa Travel is based in Lancashire, and offers UK and European holidays from departure points in the north-west, north-east, the Midlands and the south-east of England, and North Wales.
Operator rating: 9/10 "Again, we're very happy with them."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Plaxton Paragon
Engine Volvo 12-litre
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 49
Spec Air con, DVD system
Supplied by Plaxton Coach Sales 01909 551166

ON A MISSION

Bedfordshire-based On a Mission has just taken delivery of two new tri-axle Volvo B12Bs with Jonckheere bodywork. The company was so impressed with the performance of their existing B12B Jonckheeres, they decided to go for higher spec and increased capacity.

Specified with Volvo's DH12E engine rated at 460hp, coupled to the I-Shift gearbox, the 14m coaches can accommodate 59 seats, along with a separate crew compartment to enable co-drivers to rest when sharing long journeys. The high spec interior boasts leather headrests to all seats, full climate control, toilet, DVD player with two 23" monitors, satellite navigation system which permits passenger viewing and hot and cold drinks facility.

General manager, Ian Foster, reports that the new vehicles have certainly lived up to expectation. "We're more than happy," he commented. "They look perfect, they're running well, our customers love them

and and so do our drivers. In fact our drivers have reported that the driver area is even more comfortable that our previous B12Bs. The coaches are already off to Europe, earning their keep, so we can't ask for more than that.

"They're doing well on fuel and we have certainly not had any complaints from passengers. In fact, we've spoken to Volvo to see if they can come up with a deal for three more. We would be looking to trade in three of our 55-plates for three new Volvos. If they can come up with a deal, it will hopefully happen in November, but if not, then next year."

On a Mission runs a fleet of 22, of which a dozen are Volvos.
Operator rating: 8/10
"They look good, they've got a good spec and the Jonckheere body is nice."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Jonckheere
Engine Volvo DH12E 460bhp
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 59
Spec Toilet, DVD, crew compartment
Supplied by Volvo Bus 01926 414518

David Hoar of Red Kite Travel with his new Slimline Solo

RED KITE

Mistral Group has supplied Red Kite at Leighton Buzzard with a new, seat belted 9.5m Slimline Solo. The vehicle is fitted with Mobitec destination equipment and powered by an MAN Euro 4 engine.

The vehicle is painted in County Rider green, as it is to provide a service on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council.

David Hoar and Bob Savage, partners in Red Kite, said they were very pleased with the Slimline vehicle and David said that dealing with Mistral was easy, as they offer a high level of service and commitment.

"It's our second Solo," David told *CBW*. "We find the passenger reaction to them to be very positive. It's on a rural service, mainly occupied by OAPs, for whom it is a real lifeline, and they are all happy.

"It's all about what the customer demands and expects. The drivers are always pleased to see new vehicles come in too and with it being Slimline, those five or so inches make it that bit easier to manoeuvre. We'll certainly be looking at Solos again in the future."

Red Kite now runs a fleet of 15 vehicles in total, which includes two coaches.
Operator rating: 9/10 "It's a fine bus and we're pleased so far."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo 9.5m Slimline
Engine MAN Euro 4
Transmission Allison 2100 series auto
Seats 33
Spec Mobitec destination equipment
Supplied by Mistral 0800 7814144

ENHANCED SATNAV FROM NDRIVE

CBW PRODUCT OF THE WEEK

Satellite Navigation has taken a technological leap forward with the launch of the G280 and G800 from NDrive.

Boasting the world's first photo mapping system, the G280 and G800 feature real life photo images instead of traditional 1D/3D maps found on other devices. The new G280 and G800 are said to take navigation to the next level.

This technology allows users to see what the journey and destination look like from a real life perspective. Photo mapping technology heightens the senses and makes it instantly easier for drivers to see where they are and where they are heading – i.e. see what your destination looks like before setting off!

This real life 3D photo mapping system features five different perspectives; four diagonal perspectives plus a bird's eye view. The intuitive system will automatically choose the best perspective for navigating. Alternatively, users can choose a perspective manually.

The G280 and G800 feature visual and audible Speed Camera Alerts as standard and both devices are supplied with UK and Ireland Tele Atlas Q1 2008 maps which are stored on an 8GB memory card. European maps are also available on plug and play memory cards and feature photo mapping of major cities throughout Portugal, Spain, France and Italy.

With intuitive menus and touch screen buttons for easy finger input, the G280 and G800 ensure the task is straight forward. With a touch of the screen, both devices can operate in pedestrian mode and the inclusion of photo mapping makes navigating on foot a whole new experience. These devices provide a like-for-like perspective of the roads, buildings and landmarks giving a true sense of where you are in relation to your surroundings. Both the G280 and G800 also include a comprehensive POI database.

In addition to navigation ability the G280 and G800 also support audio, video and photos, all of which can be transferred via the SD card slot or USB and played back either via the built-in loudspeaker or listened to through earphones. The G800 also features Bluetooth functionality as well as an FM transmitter to play music and navigation instructions seamlessly through the vehicle's speakers.

N-Drive's photo mapping is currently available in the following UK cities; Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bristol, Barnsley, Burnley, Cardiff, Coventry, Derby, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Luton, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham, Plymouth, Preston, Reading, Sheffield, Stoke, Swansea and Wigan. Where photo mapping is not currently available, the devices switch to standard TeleAtlas mapping.

G280 SPECIFICATION AND MAIN FEATURES (£199.00 inc VAT):

- **3.5" LCD (320x240) touch screen, resistive display.**
- **3D Photo Navigation**
- **Built in Loudspeaker and 3.5mm headphone jack**
- **Input/Output USB 2.0**
- **Rechargeable Li-Ion Battery (non-removable)**
- **8GB SD Card including UK and Ireland maps (spare storage for additional maps and media)**
- **Multimedia player with support for audio, video and photos (MP3, WAV, AVI, ASF, GIF)**
- **Calculator and games**
- **Dimensions = 90/75/188mm**
- **Weight = 140grammes**

G800 SPECIFICATION AND MAIN FEATURES (£315.00 inc VAT):

- **4.3" LCD (320x240) touch screen, resistive display.**
- **3D Photo Navigation**
- **Built in Loudspeaker and 3.5mm headphone jack**
- **Input/Output USB 2.0**
- **Rechargeable Li-Ion Battery**
- **8GB SD Card including UK and Ireland maps (spare storage for additional maps and media)**
- **Bluetooth connection**
- **FM Transmitter**
- **Multimedia player with support for audio, video and photos (MP3, WAV, AVI, ASF, GIF)**
- **Calculator and games**
- **Dimensions = 121/83/200mm**
- **Weight = 210grammes**
- **The G280 and G800 are available from Smart Devices, *www.smartdevicesdirect.com* priced at £199.00 inc VAT and £315.00 inc VAT respectively.**

COLISEUM'S TYRE TRIUMPH

Southampton-based Coliseum Coaches has specified its three new Beulas Aura MAN coaches with Michelin's latest X Coach XZ tyres as original equipment.

The X Coach XZ is fitted on the steer axle and make Coliseum Coaches one of the first fleets in the UK to be operating this new Michelin tyre, which replaces the traditional Michelin XZA 2 Energy.

The decision to fit the new Michelin X Coach XZ tyres follows a 5% fuel saving which has been recorded across the fleet during the last 12 months, after a move by the company to fit Michelin X Coach XD tyres on the drive axles of all vehicles in its 12-strong fleet.

"Michelin's new generation of coach tyres have proven themselves across our fleet, with fuel savings, a quieter ride and an estimated 10,000 km increase in tyre life," says Kerry Pitter, managing director of Coliseum Coaches. "After the success we have already enjoyed with the X Coach XD, it was a natural step to specify the X Coach XZ on the steer axles of all new vehicles.

"Another major benefit of the new X Coach XD tyre is that they are M+S-rated, which means they perform well in mud and snow. This has really helped our fleet of six coaches that work on contract with Angela Holidays, as these vehicles are often operating in Switzerland and Austria which can mean hazardous driving conditions. When you have proper Michelin M+S-rated tyres fitted this usually means that snow chains need only go on in the most severe conditions. Since we began fitting Michelin X and XD tyres on the drive axles my drivers have reported back that they now rarely need to fit snow chains because of the increased traction," adds Kerry.

Good tyre experience for Coliseum

Michelin launched the X Coach XZ tyres, as fitted to the steer axles of the three new Beulas MAN vehicles and as replacement tyres on a fourth vehicle in the fleet, to meet the difficult challenge of increasing mileage, improving safety and enhancing comfort. They have been designed specifically for fitment to coaches used for long distance operations at high average speeds and benefit from an optimised tread pattern which delivers 15% more mileage potential, incorporating tread grooves which are 2mm deeper (at 15mm) and a 10mm wider tread than its predecessor.

Additionally, the new Michelin X Coach XZ is able to deliver much greater longevity while maintaining superior performance levels in other areas, notably safety. It offers a 5% increase in grip compared with the Michelin XZA 2 Energy, which in-turn delivers improved braking performance. It also uses 'ZZ' grooves in the centre of the tread to deliver a quiet ride, with this reduced noise level also due to the tyre's flat profile and closed shoulder ribs that resist uneven wear.

The new coaches will cover an average of 100,000 km per year.

- See *www.michelin.co.uk* for more details.

Recruitment

The bus and coach industry's job centre

Deadlines
Booking: Monday 3.00pm
Full artwork: Monday 5.30pm

Contact
Diane Eastwood 01733 293249
diane.eastwood@rouncymedia.co uk

Rimmer replaces Featham at CPT NW

CPT's North West regional branch has a new chairman. At a recent handover meeting, Nigel Featham, formerly managing director of Warrington Borough Transport, was replaced by Arriva North West & Wales operations director John Rimmer.

Mr Rimmer will take up the position for a two year period, while continuing his role as operations director for Arriva North West and Wales. Ironically, the change comes at the same time as Mr Featham joins the Arriva group, as managing director of its Yorkshire business.

Mr Rimmer, 57, will be dealing with a number of key issues during his tenure and is relishing the prospect. He said: "Issues such as driver CPC will have to be implemented later this year and will be a major challenge for all operators. Hopefully the CPT will be able to offer relevant support to North West bus businesses to help them get up to speed. To cope with this and other industry changes, we are also looking to bring on board a full-time regional manager and hope to announce the new appointment very shortly."

John Rimmer

Go South Coast hires marketing manager

The newly created position of marketing manager for the Go-Ahead Group's central southern companies has now been filled. Sarah Lewsey joins Go South Coast to oversee all marketing and promotional activities for bus companies Wilts & Dorset, Bluestar and Southern Vectis, also Damory, Tourist and Marchwood coaches, and Eastleigh-based vehicle refurbishment specialists Hants & Dorset Trim.

Sarah has worked in London since gaining her degree in 1999. During that time she has gained extensive experience marketing restaurants across the UK and as a brand manager for First Drinks.

Alex Carter, Managing Director of the Go South Coast companies, says that the decision to appoint someone new to the transport industry was quite deliberate. "We already have a wealth of experienced bus people in the business. The bus industry requires a diversity of skills to enable its development. Sarah has the breadth of experience to challenge and improve the way we currently present and promote our services and products to both the public and corporate clients."

Sarah has a team of eight within the Marketing Department based at Wilts & Dorset.

Sarah Lewsey

Jennings heads Continental's UK CV regional

Continental Commercial Vehicles and Aftermarket has appointed Paul Jennings as head of the regional sales organisation for the UK and Ireland. Continental Commercial Vehicles and Aftermarket business was created in December 2007 when Siemens VDO and Continental joined forces.

"It is an exciting challenge to become UK head of regional sales and part of the world's fifth largest supplier to the car and commercial automotive industry. We are well positioned to support customers in both the UK and Ireland with our vast distributor network and looking forward to meeting the future trends in the market," comments Paul.

Paul Jennings managed a successful sales and marketing team at Siemens VDO Trading UK Ltd for over eight years. Continental Automotive Trading UK product portfolio includes tachographs, digital tachograph data solutions, engine control systems, replacement parts, vehicle diagnostic systems, diesel repair components and instrumentation for OEM applications.

Paul Jennings

ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

SELECT TENDER LIST FOR BURGHCLERE AREA DEMAND RESPONSIVE PUBLIC BUS SERVICE (CANGO)

The County Council is inviting tenders from suitably registered companies for the above services. Details of the tender are given below and the companies complying with paragraph 4 should obtain and return their tenders by the date in paragraph 6.

1. **Name, address, telephone number and fax number of the contracting local authority.**
   Hampshire County Council, Director of Environment, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UD, Tel: 01962 846988 Fax: 01962 845855
   E-mail: tina.godfrey@hants.gov.uk
2. **Details of the work.**
   To provide local demand responsive bus services in the towns and environs of Burghclere in Hampshire.
   One vehicle operation (vehicle provided and owned by Hampshire County Council) – C21 Newbury-Burghclere-Woolton Hill-Newbury; C22 Newbury-Woolton Hill-Burghclere-Newbury; C23 and C24 Burghclere and Ecchinswell-Newbury/Kingsclere.
   All routes are Monday to Saturday excluding Bank Holidays.
   Contract is initially for 2 years commencing 10 August 2008 with options to extend in increments up to 5 years.
   The estimated annual value of the contract is £116,000.
3. **Where applicable, the legal form to be assumed by the grouping of service providers winning the contract.**
   Joint and several liability.
4. **Criteria for obtaining contract documents.**
   Services must be provided under the terms of the 1985 Transport Act and can only be created by companies complying with the legal and operational requirements of the Traffic Commissioner. Companies should submit their PSV O Licence number and company registration number.
5. **Criteria for the award of the contract.**
   The award criteria will be stated in the tender documents, however the County Council is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender. The basis for comparison of tenders will be to secure the required service by means of the most cost-effective and economic use of funds available to the County Council.
6. **Other Information.**
   Tenders can be obtained from the address in paragraph 1.
   Final date for receipt of tenders is 2pm on 2 July 2008.
   The tenders will be opened by authorised officers of The Chief Executive's Department and should be valid for 60 days.

Hampshire County Council

CBW
Centro of attention
Full Esteem
Euro 4 Scanias unveiled
Drivers' hours
Marketing a success story
Bristol Abus
excelsior
Excelsior's Excellent Service
CTA Show 2006
Size matters at Weavaway
Alexander speaks
Capturing the youth market
From PC to PCV MBE
Upping the Tempo
Front line
Dunn deal
Edwards: up to the Marque
Stagecoach in North Devon
Future fuel?
Grayling grilled
Inside ftr
Coach Rally
Boy Wonder
York debut
The X Factor
Transmissions
Come on England!
New look for Citaro
Accessible Scania
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BBC hits school buses
Decker design revealed
Solo survivor
What an MP thinks
Hanover stars
Arriva's latest Temsa on test
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ADL's Roll-Royce Hybrid
First on track in NW
NH deal?
Touching BASE at Helmeswood
Next stop No.10
The bespoke bus builder
New arrivals
Small is beautiful
US hybrids
Bus profits hit 10-year low
UK North grounded
Industry reels from M4 crash
195 not out
Former miner celebrates 21st
Hybrid takes AIM
Future Gazing
Winning ticket funds success
Finance Focus
Sporting life at Anthony's
Irish deal
MAN's new Catalan Star
Face 2 Face
Green Bus is top of the class
Training Special
Deal with digital
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Dart's double top
Dilbert joins CBW
Intelligent Transport
It was worth waiting for...
A few select words
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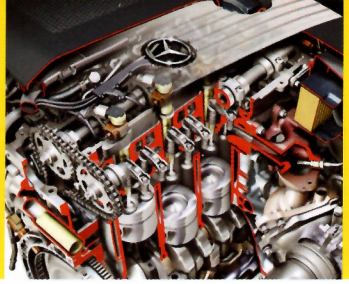
VW CADDY
On the road in VW's new six seat minibus

KFS
Fiat Ducato-based no frills 16-seater



ENGINE UPDATE
Taking diesel to its limits

CBW Minibus

THE ESSENTIAL READ FOR MINIBUS OPERATORS

May 2008

CV SHOW 2008

All the latest vehicles and products

pages 54-57

This Month

CV Show – exhibitors see it as the way to go

Yet another Commercial Vehicle Show is behind us and despite all the new Euro 4 introductions to the panel van and chassis cowl market having been phased in over the past two years, there was still a great deal to look at.

While there may be less attraction for visitors in terms of new product, exhibitors certainly find the event has serious merit and it was clear the independent converters and coachbuilders are beginning to rate it higher on their priority list than dedicated bus and coach events.

This is hardly surprising as a great many minibuses are sold as accessible transport and the biggest customers tend to be local authorities. Buyers from local authorities go to the CV Show to look at a wide range of vehicles - from refuse trucks and gulley emptying tankers to gritting machines and park maintenance pick-up trucks - so they are there in force, with an eye for anything they would run in their overall fleet.

A long standing agreement between the commercial vehicle industry and the bus and coach industry prevents specific bus and coach exhibits to appear in CV shows, however, they do get in as part of a major manufacturer's product line up or as a means to show how diverse and comprehensive a systems manufacturer, notably Eberspacher, can be with its own products.

Without exception, the exhibitors on this year's Eberspacher stand were delighted by the response they received and, because space is limited, they guard their relationship with Eberspacher jealously.

Other examples gain a showing as new technology emerges - such as the electrically driven Ford Transit minibus from Smith Electric Vehicles, the hybrid drive conversion from Connaught Engineering and LoBus, a new lowfloor minibus from Allied Vehicles.

A stark reminder popped up this week when we were contacted by an operator who had purchased a Mercedes Sprinter, seeming to be quite legitimate, which had been advertised through a magazine for around £9,500. After buying it, spending £4,000 on refurbishment and a respray, the new owner was visited by two people saying they wanted to recover it as it belonged to a leasing company. Subsequent checks revealed the vehicle did indeed remain the property of the leasing company and it now leaves the operator in a very precarious position and with the difficult task of trying to recoup his money from the vendor. Be warned! Make all the necessary checks on previous owners.

Martin Cole, Editor

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News

Gary collects his Movano with Vauxhall's Steve Bryand and talkSPORT's Ian Danter and Nigel Pearson

Coach wins bus!

15 seat Movano for footy coach

Two amateur football teams in Liverpool will be travelling in style thanks to Vauxhall Commercial Vehicles and talkSPORT radio, following a nail-biting penalty shoot-out at the annual CV Show in Birmingham.

And it was amateur player and children's coach Gary Brookes, 35, who was the lucky winner after three talkSPORT finalists from the radio station's phone-in show took part in a live penalty shoot-out final against the radio station's sports presenter, Ian Danter.

The Supply Chain Manager from Merseyside, a lifelong fan of Liverpool FC, plays in goal for Liverpool County Premier League team Remyca United, but proved he was just as good in front of goal as he is between the posts by winning the shoot out after it went to sudden death.

Gary, who helps his brother coach a youth football team, was thrilled to be the winner. "This is great news for all of us," he said. "It means I can go out in the morning with my own team to play adult matches, then in the afternoon we can take the lads out for the children's games. The bus will be running double shifts all weekend!"

He collected the prize from Vauxhall Commercial Vehicles brand manager, Steve Bryant, who added: "We're delighted that the minibus is going to a worthy cause such as this - grass roots sport is very much something that Vauxhall is keen to support, and we believe this is reflected by the fact that we've run this competition in conjunction with talkSPORT."

Gary's prize was a 15-seat Movano minibus - part of Vauxhall's range of core conversions, which include tipper bodies, dropsides and passenger carrying vehicles, plus a new Luton-bodied Movano that made its debut at the CV Show.

Vauxhall Commercial Vehicles is a key sponsor of talkSPORT's football coverage, broadcasting live every Saturday afternoon, as well as covering major midweek matches.

Four LDV Maxus 17-seaters delivered

Maxus aids recruitment

A Peterborough LDV van specialist has supplied four new minibuses to one of the city's leading recruitment agencies.

Ford and Slater, based on Newark Road, has delivered four 17- seat Maxus minibuses to One Call Recruitment Ltd. The new minibuses will strengthen the company's employee taxi service reducing the need for staff to use their own vehicles. The minibuses boost One Call's fleet of employee service vehicles to 10.

One Call Recruitment is an independent industrial recruitment agency, providing temporary staff for companies across East Anglia and the Midlands. Established in 1998, the agency specialises in providing machine operators, production workers and warehouse personnel.

One Call Recruitment's director, Andrew Chittock, said the new minibuses would help the firm meet an upsurge in business: "We operate a door to door fleet of employee transport vehicles, reducing the need for our workforce to use their own vehicles and helping to cut carbon emissions at the same time," he said.

Unwin appoints new marketing manager

C. N. Unwin Limited, Somerset based manufacturer of Unwin Safety Systems, has announced the appointment of Karen O'Gorman as its new marketing manager. In this role Karen is responsible to Managing Director, Campbell McKee for managing the company's international marketing strategy, development of new marketing plans and working closely with Director of Sales and Marketing, Gerry O'Connor on new product launches and campaigns.

Welcoming Karen to the company, Gerry O'Connor said, "Karen's wealth of marketing experience will be invaluable as we continue to grow and expand into new markets. Unwin Safety Systems are among the most technically advanced in the world and Karen's appointment is key to our ability in communicating this to market. With several product upgrades this year, Karen has joined the organisation at a very exciting time and we welcome her to the operation."

Karen O'Gorman commented, "When I first saw the Unwin range it was obvious to me that these outstanding products were world class. Throughout my marketing career I have only been able to market products and services I passionately believe are the best - Unwin Safety Systems are no exception. The product range demonstrates technical excellence in every aspect and can be attributed to the extensive resources C. N. Unwin continually invests in R & D."

Before joining Unwin, Karen was the Marketing Manager for BAA Southampton Airport. During this time she was instrumental in re-positioning the airport as 'the local airport you can breeze through'.

CTA announces new format for Autumn's show

The Community Transport Association UK has announced new partners, awards and a new format for its acclaimed annual event, taking place 28-30 October 2008 at the Manchester Central Convention Complex, Petersfield, Manchester.

ACCESS08 aims to bring together the most influential delegates and exhibition visitors with market leading exhibitors to network, debate and learn about new policy developments, services and products. The CTA is also delighted to confirm that the following partners will be hosting national one-day events as part of ACCESS08:

- Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers
- The National Wheels to Work network
- Help the Aged
- National Youth Association
- Department for Transport

Keith Halstead, chief executive of CTA UK said: "ACCESS08 is an informative event which will be essential to everyone working in the community transport sector. We've built on the successes of previous years, developed new partnerships with key audiences, and look forward to working with delegates and exhibitors to analyse and debate the most important issues in community transport."

The Rt Hon Rosie Winterton, Minster for Transport has been confirmed as principal guest at the CTA Annual Awards Night Dinner, to be held on Tuesday 28 October in the Midland Hotel adjacent to Manchester Central. An expanded list of awards will recognise innovation and excellence across the sector. Organisations are encouraged to submit their award nominations. Details will be available at *www.ctauk.org* during May.

Community Transport Association UK awards include:

- Community Transport Volunteer of the Year
- MiDAS Driver of the Year
- Best Rural Community Transport
- Best Urban Community Transport
- Best Local Authority or Passenger transport Executive
- Community Transport Social Enterprise Award
- Best Exhibitor

Nude protest

By Katherine Field

A minibus full of naked people was among the crowds trying to get close to the Olympic flame in Canberra recently – aiming to cause some disruption to the flame's progress.

The stunt was enacted by a Sydney radio station Nova 969, which had been trying to generate controversy by ferrying a group of naked people around Sydney a week earlier. Under the heading "Nova Nude Bus" it visited sites such as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's official residence Kirribilli House and Hillsong Church.

The radio station said that with heightened security it didn't expect the vehicle to get very close to the flame, but wanted to give others who were travelling to see the torch something else to look at if they didn't get near it! Station sports presenter 'Marto' commented: "We reckon there is more chance you'd spot the Nova Nude Bus than the Olympic torch." Australian press say this is the second stunt for Nova 969 in recent weeks .

Kirkham in receivership

News of the demise of specialist Peugeot minibus converter Kirkham Minibuses has emerged although it has been impossible to contact anyone at the company to establish the details.

Based at Kirkham, near Preston, the company had been in existence over 30 years and was an authorised Peugeot converter, building standard minibuses and accessible minibuses on the Boxer platform.

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *martin.cole@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

JACOBITE CRUISES

Jacobite Cruises of Inverness, has recently taken delivery of this new Esker Riada 816. The vehicle specification includes 29 leather seats, footrests, magazine nets, cooler box, PA system, double glazing & forced air.

Operations director John Belshaw told *Minibus*: "We previously ran the 815 chassis version and the drivers are reporting a noticeable difference. The 816 is more responsive with the bigger engine and it seems a better all-round product this time.

"We use AdBlue on this one, which I was a bit concerned about, but to be honest it isn't causing us too much fuss."

Jacobite specified the vehicle with full leather seating and double glazing, but decided against air conditioning. "With the glazed windows, heavier seats and other extras, air con can be a bit of a weight problem," John explains. "We had it on our last one and as we only really operate short journeys, we don't need it. We had a fridge on another one too, but again, we thought we could live without it this time."

Jacobite has been running for about six years, established by Fred Newton, formerly of Newton's Coaches.

Operator rating: 9/10 "The driver's are very impressed. It is a definite improvement from our last one."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz Vario 816/Esker Riada
Engine Mercedes-Benz 156bhp Euro 4
Transmission Six-speed manual
Seats 29
Spec Leather seats, PA system
Supplied by Harry Ferguson Coach Sales 01501 762266

ROBERTS COACHES

With 32 seats, an Optare Toro midi-coach is proving a very flexible size for Leicestershire operator Roberts Coaches.

Jonathan Hunt, who started the 30-vehicle business 12 years ago, said that this seating capacity and its high standard of luxury made the Toro suitable for a variety of jobs.

"I think we'll find a lot of work for a coach of this size and quality," he says. "For smaller parties it's more fuel-efficient compared to the larger coaches we have previously had to use. We will also be able to use it on feeder work for our own holiday tours, bringing customers in from outlying areas to our pre-tour receptions. And it's got a level of comfort that would make it suitable for our shopping, seaside and theatre day trips.

"It's also a good looking and well-designed coach offering a high level of luxury, which will appeal to the corporate market. The overall specification is very good, with air conditioning, comfortable reclining seats, and extensive use of high-quality soft trim throughout the saloon. And with air suspension on the back axle, passengers are assured of a comfortable ride.

"Our drivers like it for its compact size and ease of driving. The steering is light yet positive and the exhaust brake and retarder help to reduce the braking effort. They find that it's got ample power and that it's a very quiet vehicle. And I'm sure they'll appreciate the low-loading height of the boot, especially when on tour feeder work."

The Optare Toro is coachbuilt on the Mercedes-Benz 0816D Vario chassis by its Spanish partner, Ferqui and is just 8.74 metres long and 2.44 metres wide. It is powered by a 4.25 litre four-cylinder engine delivering 156 bhp, which is matched to a ZF 6-speed synchromesh gearbox.

Roberts Coaches is based in purpose-built premises in the village of Hugglecote near Coalville. It operates a fleet of buses including some Optare Solos and coaches from 16 to 78 seats on schools, corporate travel and private hire.

Operator rating: 9/10 "It's been very well received. Is doing all it should."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz Vario 816/Optare Toro
Engine Mercedes-Benz four cylinder 156bhp
Transmission ZF six speed
Seats 32
Spec Kiel recliners, PA system
Supplied by Optare UK 0113 2645182

JOE RUSSELL EXECUTIVE

Harry Ferguson Coach Sales Ltd has supplied Joe Russell Executive Hire with another Esker vehicle for their fleet. The 1523LL Esker Touring, which can seat up to 39 has been downgraded to seat 26, with leather seats, three coach tables and seat back tables, air conditioning, two flat screen monitors and DVD player, toilet, PA system, servery including hot and cold water facilities, large fridge, sink and storage space.

Joe Russell has previously operated Optare Soleras, but opted for Esker this time. Joe Russell junior said: "The coach itself is great, a nice drive. We've had a few small problems with the electrics on the inside, but that's just normal teething troubles you unfortunately get with new vehicles. Mechanically though, it's all sound. The driver's love it and it's getting 12mpg, which isn't bad for early days."

Joe junior went into partnership with his father in 1987. Joe senior, although retired, still has a lot to do with the firm. Tour work started in 1999 and today accounts for about 70% of the business. The Touring is near St Andrews at present on a tour and has another lined up south of the border in July.

Joe Russell also has a KVC Sprinter on order from Harry Ferguson, for delivery in June 2008.

Operator rating: 8/10 "Once it settles down I expect it to be a nice little coach."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz 1523LL/Esker Unvi
Engine Mercedes-Benz OM906 Euro 4
Transmission six speed manual
Seats 26
Spec Fridges, toilet, power points
Supplied by Harry Ferguson Coach Sales 01501 762266

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Designed, engineered and tested by the UK's leading specialist, the Unwin Quattro is the strongest retractable wheelchair restraint system in the world.

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Exhibitors laud CV Show as a key venue for business

Calls for CTA to merge with CV Show as customer enquiries keep getting better

Without exception, the independent minibus converters and coachbuilders who take part in Eberspacher's display at the Commercial Vehicle Show believe it to be the most significant event of the year.

In addition to some light commercial vehicles, Eberspacher uses the stand to show off its heating, air conditioning and climate control systems across a wide spectrum of applications. This year there were vehicles from Mellor Coachcraft, UV Modular, Bluebird Vehicles, Stanford Coachworks, Euromotive, Nu-Trak and McNeillie.

All the above-mentioned companies said the response had been remarkable as the bulk of their local authority or municipal customers were attending the show to look at all manner of vehicles - they even felt the CTA should consider joining forces with the CV Show because the level of enquiry was far higher than at Manchester in the back-end of the season.

Out on its own, yet still drawing considerable attention, was Allied Vehicles with a new lowfloor minibus called LoBus. Based on a Renault Master cowl, the vehicle features a coachbuilt body with a wide entrance and wheelchair boarding ramp, a low (260mm lowering to 215mm), flat floor throughout and a rear nearside exit door option. The body is currently built in Italy and is available in two lengths to accommodate 14 or 16 passengers. Allied Vehicles is gearing up to produce them in-house at its Glasgow facility and recently took on an additional 100,000 square feet to extend its capacity.

Currently Allied has sold a batch of 15 to Strathclyde and says they will be put to a number of duties from fare-stage work to community transport duties. LoBus is also offered with a zero-emission battery-electric drive. Allied says it is in talks with Strathclyde about these too - and some of the 15 buses may have electric drives.

Managing director of ZEV (zero emission vehicles - part of the Allied Vehicles Group) Paul Nelson said: "We've been asked to make a few modifications to the layout in order to suit the customer. Creating more space in the offside wheelchair bays and raising the rear row of seats. Customers can order the vehicles with diesel engines from 100 to 150bhp and with manual or automated manual transmissions. Allied says it can look after the vehicles with its own support network combined with the established Renault Trucks service outlets.

Citroën's award-winning Ready to Run programme has set another industry-leading benchmark, with an important 'seal of approval' for 2008. After winning the *What Van?* One-Stop Shop conversion programme award 2007, Citroën's Ready to Run programme is now the first ready-bodied vehicle scheme in which all the bodybuilders and converters are working to meet the new Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders' Body-builder Best Practice recommendations.

> THOSE WHO TAKE PART IN EBERSPACHER'S DISPLAY BELIEVE IT'S THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT

On the company's stand at this year's event was one of the first new L4 extra-long wheelbase Relay minibuses. Converted by Advanced Vehicle Builders it is now part of the Ready to Run range and offers additional passenger space for greater comfort than the L3 option.

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1. Fiat's Ducato 160 Maxi Minibus; 2.The new 4.6t Ford Transit 16-seater

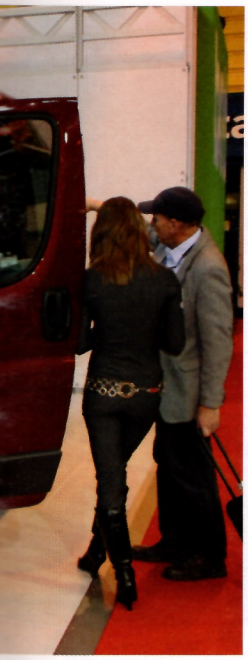
Wheelchair restraint specialist Q'Straint introduced its Q'Floor, a flexible aluminium system designed to offer maximum flexibility in seat layout while being simple to install and use.

Tested to M1 and M2 standards, Q'Floor is claimed to optimise standing space inside the vehicle because it provides a flat, level floor with just 25mm height. Its deep track profile minimises ingress of dirt and gravel which, over time, can prevent easy seat sliding.

Some 143 different combinations of aluminium extrusion, with single and double tracks, and spacer profiles. The track profiles save on installation time and ensure tracks stay parallel - allowing seats to slide easily.

Converters simply bond the floor to the vehicle with a water-based, non-toxic adhesive. No holes need drilling so potential corrosion issues are minimised. The only floor preparation required is to degrease the original metal floor.

Also new from Q'Straint is its Q'SF quick-release seat-fixing system



featuring an anti-rattle design to reduce noise and a one-handed locking device to simplify seat changing. It has been tested to M1 standards using Q'Straint airline type tracking and other popular brands.

LDV has expanded its Maxus range with a dedicated 17-seat School Bus with accessible bus options. It comes with many features as standard combined with a unique Maxus ownership package specifically designed to meet educational transport needs.

Last year LDV announced it would cease building minibuses with anything other than its 95bhp engine because speed limitation meant additional power was unnecessary, however, the new model comes on the 3.9t long wheelbase chassis and is powered by a 120bhp diesel.

Both ABS and EBD braking are now standard across the Maxus range. Additionally, the school bus features double side doors, driver and front passenger airbags, power adjustable and heated mirrors, electric windows, height adjustable driver seat, CD player with MP3 compatibility, Hi-visibility school bus livery, bright yellow seat belts, yellow grab handles and a retractable boarding step.

The vehicle on display was also fitted with front and rear parking sensors, reversing and internal camera system, reverse audible warning, audible open door warning, flush glazed windows, alloy wheels and engine compartment fire extinguisher system.

Each Maxus school bus is supplied with 'Maxus One', a comprehensive support package. Schools and colleges can also upgrade this to a 'Peace of Mind' package which extends the warranty by a further four years or 80,000 miles. It covers all aspects of vehicle ownership including a 120,000 mile/four year warranty and a two year Maxus Assist European roadside recovery programme as standard.

LDV also displayed what it could do with a Maxus interior by introducing a 'limo' version with a very comfortable saloon trimmed in sumptuous leather and complete with tables, cooker, sink, fridge, storage cupboards, satellite TV/DVD, and a fold-out double bed. The driver and front passenger area also featured leather seats and matching trim while the exterior was enhanced by a set of alloy wheels and a racy-looking top-box. A Maxus 'limo' to this specification would cost £29,000.

3. LoBus from Allied Vehicles; 4. Q'Straint's new Q-Floor; 5. Vauxhall's 9-seat Movano with mega luggage space; 6. Citroën's new L4 Relay 17-seater; 7. High spec accessible transport – a Fiat Ducato 160 Maxi from Stanford Coachworks

Vauxhall took a much larger stand this year - encouraged by a very positive reaction to the range after last year's event. Most of Vauxhall's attention was focused on its 'Black Edition' concept sport vans and its Core Conversion - off the shelf range. The company had a LWB Movano 14-seater minibus on show and a Vivaro 2300 9-seat Combi but the main point of interest to many visitors seemed to be the 9-seater Movano 3500 Combi with its huge potential for saloon layout or comprehensive luggage capacity for small parties. Customers can opt for SWB or MWB models and power options of 100 or 146bhp. Depending on options, the SWB model retails at £22, 538 - £25,945 and the MWB version from £22,029 - £24,949.

Ford's line-up contained the new ›

CV Show 2008

Transit 430 EL which provides additional length and space for its 17-seat minibus. Certified to M2 seating requirements, and with a conventional RWD driveline, it is powered by the 140bhp 2.4 litre DuraTorq engine which produces 375Nm torque.

Also on show was the FWD Transit 9-seat shuttle with the smaller 2.2 litre TDCi DuraTorq engine - again developing 140bhp and proving to be a popular option. It is priced from £21,730 - £23,630.

Renault's display showed the two extremes of a fully seated (16) Master LM39 2.4 litre DCi 120 and its smaller SL28 counterpart with just six seats and a huge luggage are in the rear saloon. Both featured the QuickShift6 automated transmission and the same engine. Basic versions of the LM39 cost £26,600 and the version on display was priced at £27,100. SL28 models start at £ 20,175 up to £24,099.

Completing the line-up was a Trafic LL29 DCi 115 which has also proved to be a popular option for small part transport and shuttle operations. Equipped with nine seats it sells for £17,654 for the six-speed manual gearbox version up to £23,241.37 with all the factory supplied options.

> FIAT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED IT WILL BE OFFERING AN AUTOMATED TRANSMISSION SYSTEM

After gaining some significant interest in its new Ducato minibus featuring an Italian conversion at last year's show, Fiat revised the specification more in line with UK requirements. The latest offering, based on a Ducato Maxi 160 Multijet featured 16 seats in a very stylish interior with full length parcel racks on each side. Seats were slightly raised on platforms to create a sunken gangway effect and a wide automatic step aided boarding through the sliding side entrance door.

Additional Fiat vehicles on the stand included a Ducato 2.3 litre 120 Multijet 33 Combi - starting at £17,600 - and the Scudo five-seat Combi with a 1.6 litre 120bhp Multijet engine and six speed manual gearbox. Fiat recently announced it will be offering an automated transmission system and this will be the subject of a separate article.

With little new or innovative to show regarding passenger transport on its Sprinter or Vito range, Mercedes-Benz had only one passenger vehicle on display - a Vito SportX Dualiner Compact. Fitted with five seats this is aimed squarely at the leisure market and prices for this start at £25,240 up to £27,140.

Volkswagen also decided it had nothing new to offer with Crafter-based passenger vehicles and concentrated entirely on its Transporter range. These included an eight-seater 130bhp model with a Tiptronic gearbox (£23,315) and its five-seat Sportline Kombi powered by a 2.5 litre 174bhp engine with a six-speed manual gearbox. Complete with alloy wheels, body styling kit and leather upholstered seating it starts off at £25,045.

VW's only new offering was the Caddy Maxi Life which is really just a shade on the small size to entice commercial operators. It can seat six passengers but offers little in the way of luggage capacity and rear seat access is not too clever. Some may find a use for it but it doesn't have anything like the practicality of the larger Transporter. Currently its on-the-road price, including VAT is £18,305.

A natural development for Smith Electric Vehicles, after releasing the 'Edison' Transit van, has been the development of a minibus version which can provide practical, emission-free transport in urban areas. The company says it is now ready to market Edison minibuses and these will be based on Ford's new 4.6t Transit to ensure a full compliment of 17 seats is possible.

A spokesman for Smith Electric Vehicles said vehicles will be priced at £45,000.

A regular exhibitor at the show, Ratcliff Palfinger, usually concentrates on its tail lift products for trucks but this year added to the display with its latest passenger lifts. The latest underfloor RUL 35AW model features a 350kg lifting capacity combined with a 1,200 x 820mm planked aluminium platform. A new version of this model, the RUL 35AWL with the same capacity but a platform extended to 1,350mm is due for launch later this year. Also on show were Ratcliff Palfinger's inboard C-Thru lifts.

Euromotive showed its Volkswagen Crafter accessible conversion featuring

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1. A Renault Master with accessible conversion; 2.The new Mellor Coachcraft 16-seat Mercedes Viagio 0813D; 3.UV Modular's Mercedes Sprinter-based Treka; 4. Volkswagen Caddy Maxi Life

5. LDV's new 17-seat schoolbus on the Maxus platform; 6. A Euromotive conversion on a VW Crafter

a powered entrance door and a Ratcliff Palfinger underfloor lift. The saloon floor was fitted with full-length tracking and nine seats had been installed to create plenty of space for up to four wheelchairs at the rear. A reversing camera had been installed above the rear doors.

Euromotive's associate bodybuilder, Nu-Track also had a vehicle on display, an Iveco Daily featuring a coachbuilt body. The vehicles are bodied in Northern Ireland and then finished off and marketed by Euromotive. The example on display could seat up to 21/24 passengers although up to 26 seats are possible on the longer wheelbase option. Unsurprisingly - both were equipped with Eberspacher D5L heating units.

Another guest exhibitor was Bluebird Vehicles, showing one of its two-axle Tucana lowfloor minibuses built to Essex County Council specification. The Tucana is based on a Volkswagen Transporter with an automatic gearbox and features a wide, single-step entrance with a low, flat floor and space for 14 seats. The design offers generous passenger space with exceptional headroom which allows luggage racks to be fitted on either side of the saloon.

UV Modular showed its Treka composite-bodied Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 515 automatic, featuring a powered door and equipped with 16 seats plus two wheelchair spaces. UVM's Ken Goodson said they'd had a good show and he was looking forward to things settling down after all the excitement created by Asset Co taking over the company. He confirmed bus production was to remain at the Brighouse plant and not be transferred to Papworth as had been widely rumoured.

Mellor Coachcraft publicly unveiled its new coachbuilt Mercedes-Benz Vario O813D which was completed to Tower Hamlets specification. It features a coach-style front, one-piece composite panels to create a tidy and stylish appearance and composite internal trim mouldings. It was equipped with 16 seats, space for two wheelchairs and a Ratcliff Palfinger underfloor lift.

Stanford Coachworks presented an extra-long wheelbase L4 Fiat Ducato 160 Multijet, essentially an accessible specification minicoach but with a coach-style interior plus a couple of unusual special features. One of these was easy enough to spot as it involved a 360-degree swiveling passenger seat - the other would be a little more difficult for most as it was the installation of air conditioning vents as fitted in a Lamborghini Gallardo.

Director Lee Wiggins said: "We liked the look of these units and eventually found where we could obtain them. They are only about £3-£4 more expensive than a standard unit, so they won't break the bank and just add something that bit different."

The Ducato had been fitted with 16 seats and a Ricon K-Series underfloor lift. The company had hoped to fit more seats in the vehicle but discovered the load length quoted for the L4 does not match the actual measurement.

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Fiat's new Comfort-Matic gearbox is starting to appear in the market

Fiat Comfort-Matic robotised gearbox

Fiat Professional chose the Dusseldorf Caravan Salon in summer 2007 to preview a new generation of robotised gearboxes called Comfort-Matic.

As from January 2008, the units became available on the Fiat Ducato Maxi models featuring the powerful 3.0 litre 160 Multijet Power engine which is rated at 157bhp.

In common with existing automated manual gearboxes, the Comfort-Matic combines the excellent performance of the 160 Multijet with the low consumption of a mechanical transmission and the simplicity and ease of use of an automatic. Fiat Professional feels the new option is sure to attract the interest of sector professionals who will appreciate its performance, flexibility and versatility.

Additionally, Comfort-Matic is said to offer a concrete response for a variety of duties: from recreational (trailers, motorhomes, campers) to city deliveries, personal transport within city limits, minibus operation and public fleet incorporating postal services and municipal applications.

During the development stage in particular, great attention was paid to the adaptation and personalisation of the gearbox for recreational vehicles. Hence the use of camper-like prototypes for the fine-tuning and testing phase, with faithful reproduction of the front surface configurations, gross vehicle weight and conditions of use typical of this class of vehicle. In addition, as is often the case with trailers and motorhomes which by their very nature are employed in conditions of maximum load, the trim on the Comfort-Matic presents an "UP" button which makes it possible to optimise gear-change points automatically, thus guaranteeing optimal engine revs in all circumstances and improving performance in particularly demanding conditions or on steep slopes.

Technically the gearbox is called an MTA (Manual Transmission Automated) and consists of a traditional mechanical gearbox on which the manual leverage is replaced by an actuator that is electronically controlled by a TCU (Transmission Control Unit).

In detail, the gearbox offers six gears (plus reverse) with modes that are totally automatic and manual sequential with actuation.

In manual mode the driver can freely choose the ratio required by manoeuvring the joystick gear lever on the dash. There is no clutch pedal.

In automatic mode the customer has the benefit of a variety of useful functions typical of the electronic operation of the gearbox:

- **UPHILL – DOWNHILL MODE:** gear changing logics operated by software to guarantee the best ratio depending on the slope in the road;
- **WARM UP MODE:** emission reduction strategy for cold starts;
- **BRAKE ASSISTANCE MODE:** reduction of ratios to support vehicle deceleration;
- **KICK DOWN MODE:** reduction in the ratio following abrupt acceleration (for example while overtaking);
- **FAST OFF DETECTION:** gearbox inhibition if the accelerator is released rapidly.

In automatic mode, the Comfort-Matic offers various advantages compared to a manual unit. For example, maximum driving comfort, especially in heavy urban traffic, in addition to greater comfort due to the smoothness of the gearbox. In addition, pressing the "UP" button on the gearbox trim allows drivers to take advantage of a specific profile for driving in the mountains or in heavy load conditions. And again: the Comfort-Matic assures correct engine braking on steeply sloping roads while the control systems guarantee maximum reduction of transmission noise. Without mentioning that the new unit protects the drive shaft from overloading and offers less wear on brakes.

Compak widens door horizons

Martin Cole looks at a door offering from the well-known ramp supplier

Having built a strong presence in the bus market for folding and powered passenger access ramps, Compak's new Door Engineering subsidiary is keen to expand into minibus/minicoach door production.

Compak Door Engineering's display of innovative products went down particularly well at last year's Busworld Kortrijk exhibition and generated a great deal of potential. Tony Rodwell said: "A lot of European manufacturers were extremely keen on our double plug door system which is suitable for buses, trams or trains – and there was substantial interest in doors for smaller buses and coaches too."

What Mr Rodwell believes will be the key factor for UK converters and bodybuilders is the company's ability to produce door systems in small batch runs – whereas many large established concerns are only interested in tooling up for mass production.

End customers will also be encouraged that Compak, having been a main supplier to the majority of UK bus groups, in addition to having built up a worldwide clientele, also knows how important it is to provide robust and reliable products with the necessary stock of spare parts and the ability to respond quickly in the event of a failure.

> THERE WAS SUBSTANTIAL INTEREST IN DOORS FOR SMALLER BUSES AND COACHES TOO

The doors were designed by John Gilbert & Co, and can be supplied as a plug amd play single unit with extending ramp

Based in London's Charlton district, Compak, itself part of the VIP Group which includes Truck-Align and is also expert at vehicle repair, re-spray, re-engineering and servicing, prides itself on having developed reliable ramp systems and intends to do exactly the same with doors.

The products were first shown in the UK at the CTA Event in 2006. The operating systems had been designed by John Gilbert & Co, but Compak assembles them and takes on quality control responsibility in its own facilities. In many instances the doors have been designed to be installed as a plug-and-play unit incorporating a boarding ramp. Compak has one unit which can offer an automatic powered extending ramp from a floor height of 370mm – ideal for minibuses with lowered floors which don't have the lowering capacity to achieve a 250mm level boarding height.

Mr Rodwell said: "We understand there is an appetite in the market for doors which are reliable and functional. We have a lot of experience in bus and commercial vehicle support operations – so we understand the needs of customers. We also have the ability to back up and service any products we supply."

■ For further details contact Tony Rodwell on 07989 525163.

New Mercedes-Benz OM651 engines for Euro 5

Mercedes introduces a new range of four-cylinder diesel engines, offering improved torque, efficiency and smoothness.

Mercedes-Benz is claiming there is no better way to mark the 150th anniversary of Rudolf Diesel's birth than to introduce a brand new generation of four-cylinder diesel engines.

In its most powerful variant, the new four-cylinder unit develops 204 bhp from its 2.143 litres capacity, delivering around 20% more power than the engine it replaces. Peak torque has risen 25% from 400 Nm to 500 Nm. Despite the 25 kW increase in output, the new four-cylinder diesel burns substantially less fuel than its predecessor too.

Mercedes-Benz says the new engine will be incorporated across a wide spectrum of model variants including passenger cars and the Sprinter.

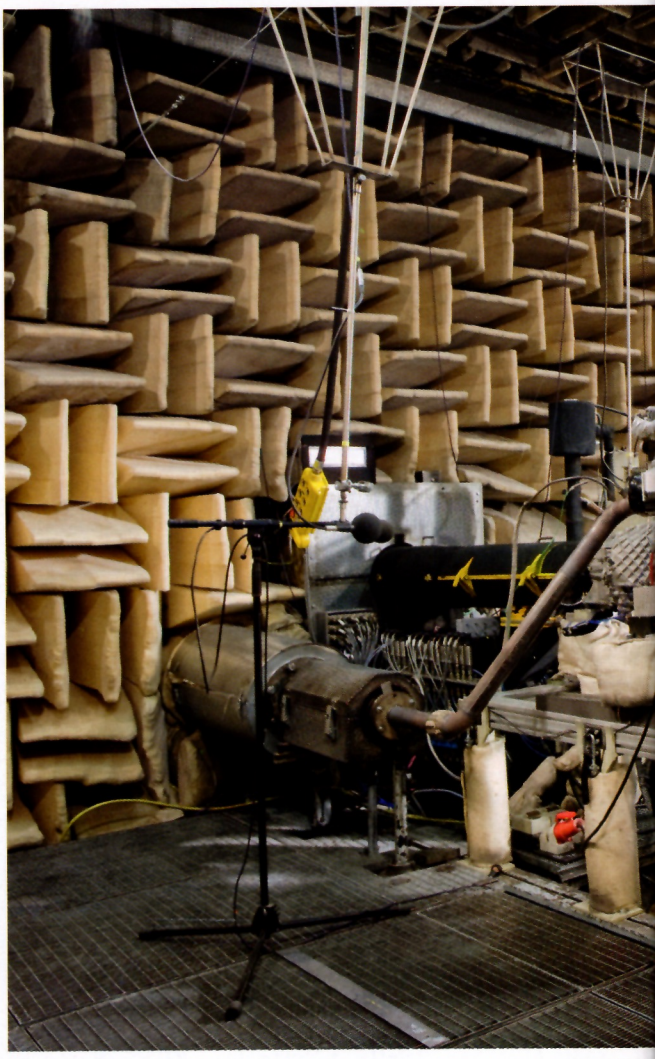
The new four-cylinder diesel generation is being produced at the Unterturkheim plant. Mercedes-Benz believes it charters territory from which diesel engines, particularly four-cylinder units, have previously been excluded. It redefines standards for power output and torque and for fuel consumption and exhaust emissions, setting benchmark figures which no other comparable series-production engine is able to match.

"This takes our new four-cylinder unit into a realm which has so far been the preserve of three-litre six-cylinder diesel or large V8 petrol engines – all combined with exemplary fuel economy," commented Dr. Thomas Weber, who is responsible for Group R&D at Mercedes-Benz Cars.

Quite apart from its outstanding power output data, the new drive unit also boasts markedly superior torque build-up from low revs compared to the engine it replaces, along with a class-beating torque characteristic curve. This means that the engine can be run extremely economically at low rev speeds in routine driving situations.

Thanks to its high power potential it has been possible to apply the downsizing principle, where smaller engines with fewer cylinders are used in order to lower fuel consumption effectively. Three different variants are initially planned for use in passenger cars and will be introduced on other vehicles later. It can be installed in-line or transversely and will have application in 4x4 vehicles and possibly as a low-emission power plant for hybrid vehicles.

After a 48-month development period, design engineers built the first prototype of the new engine in August 2005. Some 100,000 hours on the test rig were required to elicit optimum performance characteristics from the new engine under all conditions and regardless of the intended purpose. The power units were subject to tough endurance testing, including acutely demanding cycles on the test rigs that were designed to determine longevity in addition to performance. Over a distance of ten million test kilometres in a variety of vehicles, the engine was then required to prove its mettle in the baking heat of the desert and the icy cold of the polar regions, withstanding dust, mud, water and the very harshest treatment in the process.



The new four-cylinder diesel engine is being produced at Mercedes-Benz's Unterturkheim plant

THE KEY DATA

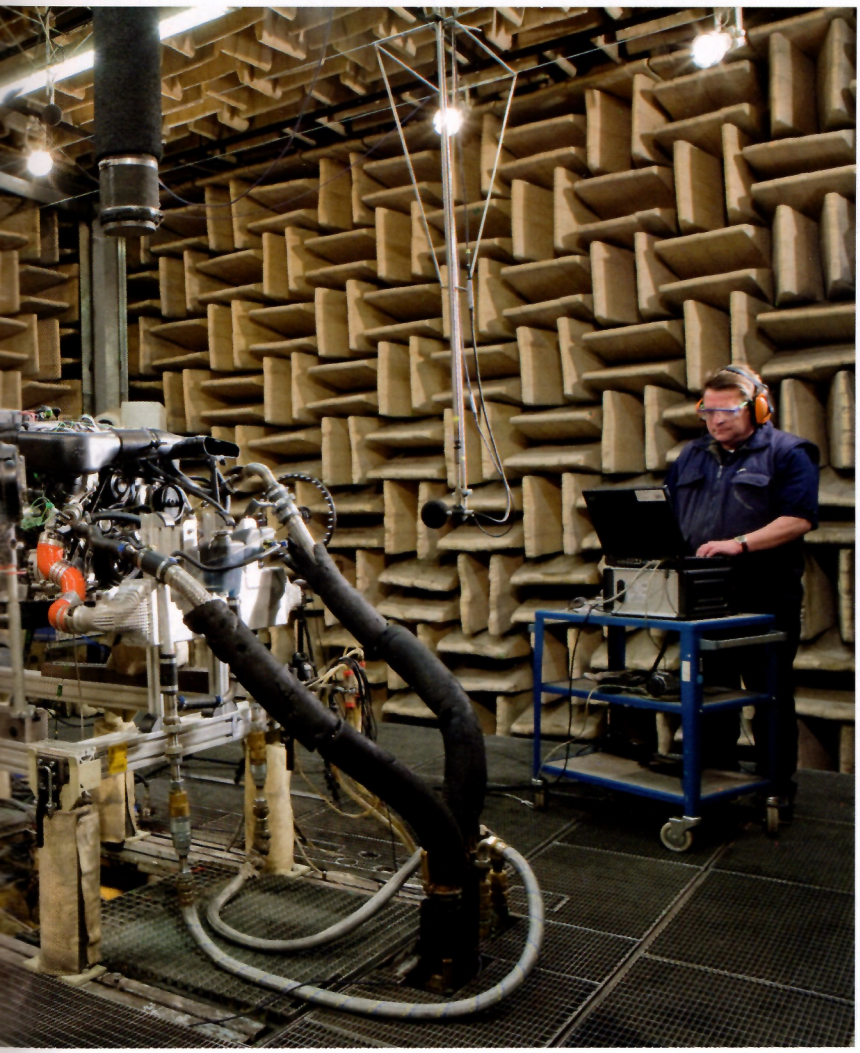
** with automatic transmission*

	250 CDI	220 CDI	200 CDI
Number of cylinders	4	4	4
Valves per cylinder	4	4	4
Displacement, cc	2143	2143	2143
Bore/stroke, mm	83.0/99.0	83.0/99.0	83.0/99.0
Compression ratio	16.2:1	16.2:1	16.2:1
Output, kW/hp	150/204 at 4200 rpm	125/170 at 3200 - 4800 rpm	100/136 at 3000 - 4600 rpm
Torque, Nm	500 at 1600 - 1800 rpm	400 at 1400 - 2800 rpm	330 at 1600 - 2800 rpm*

Innovative technologies

Exemplary figures achieved by the new engine for output and torque characteristics, economy, exhaust emissions and smoothness are the result of a whole raft of technologies. These include a number of new developments not currently to be found in any other standard-production diesel engine in the car or LCV sectors. The principal features of the new engine are:

- Two-stage turbocharging ensures high power output and optimum torque delivery.
- Fourth-generation common-rail technology with a rail pressure that has been increased by 400 bar to 2000 bar, plus a new piezoelectric injector concept featuring direct injector needle control creates the ideal basis for more flexible injection timing, leading to smoother engine running, lower fuel consumption and reduced emissions.
- The maximum ignition pressure is 200 bar.
- Both the oil-spray nozzles and the water pump are activated in accordance with requirements to save energy.
- The camshaft drive is positioned at the rear in order to enhance running refinement and satisfy pedestrian protection requirements.



- The engine block is made from cast iron, the cylinder head from aluminium.
- Two water jackets guarantee maximum cooling even at the points of greatest thermal radiation; it is this that enables an ignition pressure of 200 bar and a high power-to-displacement ratio.
- The aluminium pistons run in cast-iron barrels for minimum friction.
- The connecting rods are made from forged steel, optimising weight.
- In the interests of vibrational comfort, the forged crankshaft with its eight counterweights turns supported by five bearings. The radii of the crankpins are rolled for high strength.
- To compensate for the free vibration moments which are inherent to four-cylinder inline engines there are two Lanchester balancer shafts at the bottom of the engine block running in low-friction roller bearings.
- A two-mass flywheel, featuring a primary flywheel mass fixed to the crankshaft that is connected to the secondary flywheel mass on the transmission by means of springs isolates the crankshaft's vibration stimuli from the drivetrain, contributing to the engine's smoothness.

Common Rail Injection

The new fourth generation of the tried-and-tested common-rail direct injection technology utilizes an increase of 400 bar in the maximum rail pressure, which now equals 2,000 bar. This rise in pressure potential was of crucial importance for boosting the engine's output to 150 kW/204 hp and its torque to 500 Nm, while at the same time bringing about a marked improvement in the engine's untreated emissions.

Piezoelectric injectors, a completely new development, form one of the key components in the fourth-generation CDI technology. They harness the ability of piezoelectric ceramic to alter its crystalline structure with microsecond speed when an electrical voltage is applied. The actual spatial movements produced are 'tiny' and for this reason the new injectors are fitted with a piezo stack, which is basically made up of piezoelectric elements connected in series. In contrast to the customary systems used to date, the movement of these elements controls the injector needle directly and enables even greater alterations in volume that are accurate to within a few thousandths of a millimetre. The benefits of this are an increase in the available injection volume as well as particularly fine and fast metering of the injection quantities. This enables the fuel injection process to be adapted to the momentary engine load and rev speed with yet greater exactness - by means of high-precision multiple injections of fuel for example - which has a positive impact on emissions, consumption and combustion noise. Plus, the engine runs even more quietly when idling.

As a result of the innovative actuation concept, injector operation is completely leak free. This dispenses with the need for a leak oil line to return the negligible quantities of fuel that used to accumulate unavoidably in the system on account of the operating principle. This improves the injection system's thermal circuit to such an extent that, even at a rail pressure of 2,000 bar, fuel cooling is superfluous to requirements. Not only does this save energy, it reduces the high-pressure pump's operating energy input by around 1kw at high engine loads.

200 bar ignition pressure

The fuel is injected into a combustion chamber featuring a meticulously devised geometrical form with precision-calculated recesses in the piston crowns. Compared to the engine it replaces, the combustion chamber has been made flatter and the diameter somewhat larger. The compression ratio was reduced from 17.5:1 to 16. 2:1. This optimises the combustion process by achieving a lasting reduction in untreated emissions - NOx levels in particular have been cut drastically.

One of the determining factors for maximum power output and for fuel consumption at full throttle, from an emissions point of view, is the maximum ignition pressure. With a pressure of 200 bar, in order to guarantee spontaneous starting, the engine is fitted with ceramic glow plugs which attain a temperature approximately 200°C higher than metallic glow plugs (1250°C as opposed to 1050°C) and are virtually wear-free.

Two-stage turbocharging

The new diesel unit draws air from two turbochargers, marking the first ever instance of two-stage turbocharging in a series-manufactured light diesel engine. The aim of this concept is to eliminate the inherent drawbacks of a single-stage turbocharger. These include the moment of inertia of a large turbocharger, which drivers may perceive as turbo lag. ›

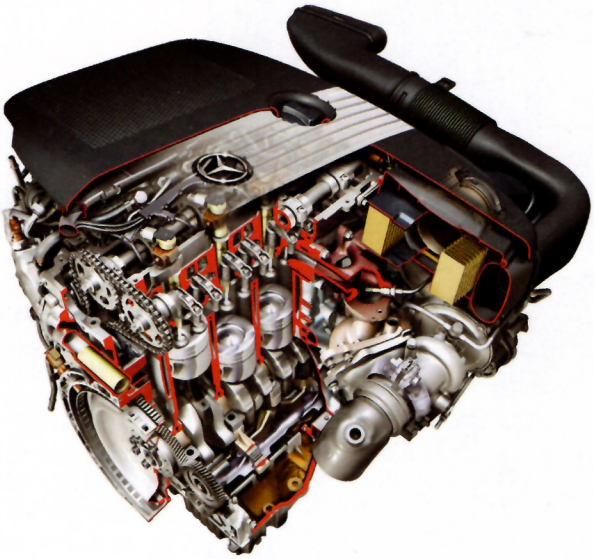
The compact-sized module for the two-stage turbocharging concept consists of a small high-pressure (HP) plus a large low-pressure (LP) turbocharger. Both comprise a turbine and a turbine-driven compressor, and are connected in series:

- The HP turbine has a diameter of 38.5 mm and is positioned directly in the exhaust manifold. The exhaust gases flow through this turbine first, causing it to rotate at speeds of up to 248,000 revolutions per minute.
- Integrated into the HP turbine housing is a bypass duct, which can be opened or closed by means of a charge-pressure control flap triggered by an actuator. If the duct is closed, the entire exhaust, the whole exhaust stream flows through the HP turbine, meaning that all of the energy contained in the exhaust gases can be directed towards propelling the HP turbine only.
- As the engine speed increases, the charge-pressure control flap opens to prevent the HP charger from becoming overloaded. A portion of the exhaust stream now flows through the bypass duct to relieve the load.
- Downstream from the HP turbine, the two exhaust gas streams join up again, and any remaining exhaust energy drives the 50-millimetre LP turbine.
- To protect it against overload, the LP turbine also features a bypass duct, which is opened and closed by means of an actuator-controlled wastegate.
- Once the engine reaches medium rev speeds, the HP turbine's charge-pressure control flap is opened so wide that the HP turbine ceases to perform any appreciable work. This allows the full exhaust energy to be directed with low losses into the LP turbine, which then does all of the turbine work.

The benefits of elaborate, needs-driven control of the combustion air feed with the aid of two turbochargers are improved cylinder charging (for high output), meaning abundant torque even from low rev speeds. Besides this, fuel consumption is lowered too. The upshot of this as far as the driver is concerned is harmonious driving characteristics with zero turbo lag, and good torque delivery over all rev bands.

Intercooler and exhaust gas recirculation optimised

The new turbocharger system is perfectly complemented by an intercooler that has been enlarged compared to the previous series-production version and now lowers the temperature of the air - that has been first compressed and therefore heated up - by around 140°C, allowing a greater volume of air to enter the combustion chambers.



The new OM605 Euro 5 with twin turbocharger

After the intercooler, an electrically controlled flap ensures precise regulation of the fresh air and recirculated exhaust gas. So as to optimise the quantity of exhaust gas recirculated and thereby achieve high recirculation rates, the exhaust gases are cooled down as required in a powerful heat exchanger with a large cross-sectional area. This combines with the HFM (hot-film air-mass sensor) modules, which are integrated into the fresh-air supply and provide the engine management unit with exact information on the current fresh air mass, to bring about a substantial reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions. The engine can be started at temperatures as low as approximately zero degrees Celsius with no preglow waiting period.

Intake port shut-off for optimum air supply

The combustion air subsequently flows into the charge-air distributor module, which supplies air to each cylinder in a uniform manner. Built into the distributor module is an electrically controlled intake port shut-off which allows the cross-sectional area of each cylinder's intake port to be smoothly reduced in size. This alters the swirl of the combustion air in such a way as to guarantee that the charge movement in the cylinders is set for optimum combustion and exhaust emissions over the full spectrum of engine loads.

Rear-mounted camshaft drive

The list of the new four-cylinder diesel engine's principal innovations also includes the rear-mounted camshaft drive. This allows statutory pedestrian protection requirements to be fulfilled when the engine is installed lengthways with the bonnet rising towards the rear. The vibration stimuli originating from the crankshaft are furthermore lower on the rear face of the engine than at the front, which benefits the engine's exceptionally smooth running.

The valve timing mechanism is another new development and reduces friction at the 16 inlet and exhaust valves, which are controlled by one overhead inlet shaft and one overhead exhaust shaft acting via cam followers featuring hydraulic valve clearance compensation. The camshaft, Lanchester balancer as well as the ancillary assemblies are driven by a combination of gearwheels and just a very short chain drive. It was possible to reduce the increased noise levels usually associated with a gearwheel drive by carrying out painstakingly detailed refinement.

Controllable water and oil pumps save fuel

The electrically controllable water and oil pump which can be activated in accordance with requirements are also unique features for a standard-production diesel engine. Piston cooling is taken care of by an oil pump with a central valve for controlling all four piston-cooling sprayer units with their large oil-spray nozzles. The result is identical basic thermal conditions for all cylinders. The generously sized nozzles promise optimum piston cooling, even when operating under full load, guaranteeing a long service life in the process. The controllable water pump is yet another innovative new feature. Just like the controllable oil sprayer units, the water pump also helps to quickly warm up the combustion chamber and the friction partners.

Development potential

In spite of its unrivalled power output, model running characteristics and outstanding fuel consumption figures, the new four-cylinder diesel engine from Mercedes-Benz holds yet further, untapped potential. Development work is continuing on the possibilities offered by ultra-flexible injection timing with a view to exerting an even more positive effect on engine emissions.

In addition, combining the technology with other consumption-optimisation technologies - such as those found in hybrid vehicles - will achieve further significant reductions in fuel consumption.

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KFS FIAT DUCATO MAXI

New Fiat Ducato Maxi 16-seater from KFS

KFS has taken a Fiat Ducato Maxi chassis cowl and created a coach-built no-frills 16-seater. Martin Cole reports.

Andover-based KFS has launched a new addition to its vehicle line-up with the development of a 16-seat coachbuilt minibus based on Fiat's Ducato Maxi.

Launched in Birmingham last week, the new KFS, which has not yet been given an official name, is built on the 3.0 litre 160bhp Multijet platform and begins life as a dual-cab chassis cowl. KFS removes the original chassis and the rear of the cab and then installs a fully type-approved galvanised Alko chassis which gives a much lower floor height that the original.

KFS installs Unwin Innotrax flooring with full-length seat tracking to provide maximum flexibility on seating or wheelchair space configuration. Managing director Ian Knight said: "We've gone for this particular model because it gives us a 4.5 tonne gross weight and allows us to achieve the magic 16 passenger requirement with sufficient scope to install a rear boarding ramp or an underfloor cassette lift - whatever the customer prefers. There will be a choice of air assisted or full air rear suspension. Both will enhance ride quality but are necessary with ramp-equipped models to lower the vehicle and reduce the approach angle for the boarding ramp."

The new 16-seater features a Tamware power-plug front entrance door and a two-step entrance. Although the bottom step is currently just 210mm from the ground, KFS plans to raise it slightly as the second step has a 250mm height and is deemed too much. Mr Knight feels sacrificing some of the low 210mm boarding height to achieve balance will be more appreciated by passengers. Some of the loss could be offset for customers opting for full air rear suspension as lowering it at a stop should return the first step height to around 220mm.

KFS has sold the first vehicle to Lancashire County Council and it will be operated by Preston Community Transport. Further orders from Lancs CC are in the offing depending on its performance over a period of evaluation.

It has been a relatively cheap development in that KFS has, to a great extent, been able to utilise the same interior and exterior panels and mouldings as are produced for its Liberty model. The interior is fully panelled in composite mouldings with a single moquette roof strip to soften the appearance. Full-length continuous strip fluorescent lighting is installed either side of the saloon and an overhead LED strip lamp provides additional illumination for the rear boarding area.

Clockwise from above left: Rescroft Defender Seats fitted in a 2+1 combination. The new vehicle utilises many of the panels used on the existing Liberty range. Driver comfort is high on the new Ducato. Full length doors feature top-to-bottom glass which allows plenty of natural light into the saloon. Tamware power plug front entrance.

Seating is arranged in a two-plus-one layout with tilt and fold seating at the rear to allow simple space creation for boarding a wheelchair. The vehicle on display was equipped with ten Rescroft Defender seats and four tilt and fold units to meet customer requirements. It had still to be fitted with a ramp which is the customer's preferred option.

The single piece roof incorporates a ventilation hatch and the flush-glazed tinted windows are fitted with top sliders. Rear doors feature top-to-bottom glass, letting in plenty of light and are secured in the open position by magnetic catches. No actual information on the maximum number of wheelchairs permissible is available but, with all seats removed, it would

appear there is space for seven.

Sales & marketing director Steve Elwell said: "People are looking at this vehicle as a direct replacement for the former Rohill RoMoBus. It is a no-frills package designed to keep the cost down yet provide a robust and practical vehicle that will give reliable service. The 3.0 litre engine with its high power rating is more than sufficient but it does give us the weight capacity operators require. As they are all now subject to speed limitation it doesn't make a great deal of difference as long as it is used sensibly."

Driver comfort is extremely good in the new Ducato. The launch vehicle had been fitted with a two-man digital tachograph, a CD/radio system, a reversing camera and rear parking sensors. The original cab passenger seating had been removed and a large luggage pen installed in its place. The Ducato's original overhead storage area had been further extended by the new roof moulding which provides an additional shelf to store driver or attendant's personal items or special equipment such as harnesses, passenger restraints or wheelchair tie-downs.

Customers can now specify the vehicle with the Comfort-Matic automated transmission instead of the standard six-speed manual gearbox.

KFS continues to produce its Liberty-bodied Renault Master and also builds a range of car transporters and other commercial units. A Liberty on display alongside the new minibus was one of a batch of 20 destined for service with Nottinghamshire County Council – which currently runs eight of them in its existing fleet.

The new KFS, built to a similar specification as the launch model, is priced around £57,000. For full details contact Steve Elwell on 07795 383707.

VOLKSWAGEN CADDY MAXI LIFE

Above: New Caddy Maxi Life is a compact six seater. Far left: Sliding doors provide reasonable access. Left: leg room is acceptable for its class. Right: Luggage space is good when the third row of seats is not in use. Far Right: Driver benefits from VW's DSG auto box.

VW's Canny Caddy

Martin Cole looks at the new VW Caddy Maxi Life, based on the company's enlarged Caddy van, and finds a comfortable but limited addition to the market

The latest addition to Volkswagen's passenger vehicle range is the Caddy Maxi Life.

Based on the new, enlarged version of its Caddy van, the vehicle is capable of seating six passengers, but this is a small MPV and can't compete on space or comfort against the more traditional Transporter-based minibuses.

Driver and front passenger comfort is as good as one could expect from most small saloon cars and sliding saloon doors allow reasonable access to the three seats behind. These are split into a double and a single unit. The single folds and tips forward to allow access to two more seats in the rear. The rear seats can be folded forwards to allow increased luggage space but if they are in use there is only limited space between them and the rear tailgate.

Access to the rear seats without folding up a centre seat is impossible and could also raise issues over passenger evacuation in the event of an emergency.

If the rear seats are removed from the vehicle it does leave a more-than-adequate space for luggage but with only four passenger seats remaining it can offer little more practicality than a medium or large saloon car. It may have a valid use as a crew shuttle or for niche operation for running a small family to the airport or satisfying a school contract for up to six children, but its compact nature means its versatility is limited. Saloon storage space is limited to a centre console compartment, some elasticated net pouches and a slim aperture in the roof space above the driver and front passenger.

In terms of performance, the Caddy Maxi Life is surprisingly good. It is powered by a 1.9 litre diesel engine producing 104bhp and 250Nm torque. This is coupled with VW's automated six-speed DSG transmission, which is excellent, and it also features a sport mode - which seemed largely superfluous. If selected, sport mode allows the engine to hang on longer in each gear for faster acceleration - at the expense of economy.

It holds the road extremely well, has sure, nimble handling and gives a comfortable ride. It can more than hold its own in all traffic conditions and is reportedly very economical. VW claims 33.5mpg for urban cycle, 46.3mpg for extra-urban and its combined consumption is 40.4mpg.

VW also offer a three-year or 100,000 mile warranty, paintwork is covered for three years and the body has a 12-year protection warranty. Servicing comes under VW's LongLife Service Regime - which is variable depending on the type of use and mileage.

The Caddy Maxi Life is also very well appointed with all the features people would expect when buying a family saloon. The only additional options fitted to the demonstration vehicle were 16-inch alloy wheels (£670), rear parking sensors (£245) rear privacy glass (£140), satellite navigation system (£240) and metallic paint (£295).

The package was given a recommended retail price, including VAT, delivery, number plates, VED and registration fee, of £17,495.

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Mercedes-Benz

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Feature front entry power door, 28 high back reclining seats, full air conditioning, double glazing, luggage racks, reading lights, large boot, digitac, CD, PA, stereo, curtains, Euroliners, 50,000 miles, one owner, mint.

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MERCEDES

(W) 2000 MERCEDES 614 VARIO 19 WIDE SEATER

Features front entry with lowered step, 19 FULL Size coach seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks with forced air and reading lights, dropwell boot, tinted windows, walnut dash kit, Euroliners, stereo, skirts, analogue Tacho, excellent condition

£16,995 ***Finance from £59 p/w***

(52) 2002 MERCEDES 413CDI SPRINTER 16 SEATER

Features side entry with power step, 16 full size highback seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks with forced air and reading lights, analogue Tacho, walnut dash kit, Euroliners, superb condition.

£14,995 ***Finance from £50 p/w***

(X) 2000 MERCEDES 413 CDI FRONT ENTRY 16 SEATER

Features front entry, 16 full size coach seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks, forced air, reading lights, Euroliners, walnut dash, tacho, excellent condition

£14,995 ***Finance from £50 p/w***

(R) 1998 MERCEDES 412 D SPRINTER FRONT ENTRY 16 SEATER

Features front entry,16 full size highback seats, 3 point belts, tacho, luggage racks, one owner full service history, excellent buy

£9,995 ***Finance from £33 p/w***

(R) 1997 MERCEDES 410 LUX 16 SEATAUTOMATIC WITH AIRCON

Features front entry lowered step, 16 highback full size seats, 3 point belts, full air conditioning, tables, Automatic gearbox, body skirts, boot, euroliners, luggage racks, reading lights, nice little bus.

£11,995 ***Finance from £39 p/w***

(53) 2004 MERCEDES SPRINTER 313CDi FRONT ENTRY 16 SEATER

Features: Front entry, 16 full size high back coach seats, 3 point belts, tinted bonded windows, luggage racks, footwell locker, rear row seats removeable.

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(02) & (53) MERCEDES SPRINTER 311CDi 16 SEATERS

Features front entry, 16 full size highback seats, 3 point belts, tinted bonded windows, luggage racks, rear row seats removable, footwell locker, excellent condition. Choice

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(V) 1999 MERCEDES EUROCOACH EX 33 MEGA LUXURY 23 SEATER A/C TOILET

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(57) 2008 IVECO 45C15 MILLENNIUM LUXURY MINICOACH

Features Stunning paintwork. Digitac, 16 high back coach seats with fitted three point seat belts, luggage racks with integrated blown air and reading lights, extra internal lighting, flat screen DVD, stereo sound system, walnut dash, massive boot, skirts, bonded panoramic windows, curtains and Euroliners.

POA

TOYOTA

(Y) 2000 TOYOTA OPTIMO MK V WIDE BODY 18 SEAT SUPERBOOTER

This superb vehicle features 18 **leather recliners**, 2 tables, full air conditioning, specially designed super boot, PA, luggage racks, drinks m/c, finished in Metallic grey, must be seen.

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(Y) 2001 TOYOTA OPTIMO MKV 22 SEATER WITH AIR CON

A one owner vehicle with front entry power door, 22 full size reclining seats. Full vehicle air conditioning, PA, stereo, power door, luggage racks, large boot, Euroliners, courier seat, superb.

£25,995 ***Finance from £89 p/w***

(W) 2000 TOYOTA OPTIMO MKV 22 SEATER WITH AIR CON

Features front entry power door, 22 reclining coach seats, seatbelts, luggage racks with reading lights, full vehicle aircon, large boot, Euroliners, pa stereo, excellent condition.

£24,995 ***Finance from £85 p/w***

LDV CONVOY MAX

(56) 2006 LDV CONVOY MAX 8 SEAT SUPER BOOTER

This amazing vehicle has front entry power door, 8 high back coach seats in club layout with 2 tables, **colossal boot**. Luggage racks, forced air, reading lights, skirts, euroliners, 9,000 miles only. Fantastic Buy

£18,995 ***Finance from £64 p/w***

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(04 & 54) LDV CONVOY 16 SEATERS

Choice of 2. Standard factory 16 seaters in first class condition.

From £8,495 ***Finance from £28 p/w***

(03) 2003 LDV CONVOY 16 SEATER

Standard factory minibus with 16 highback seats, 3 point belts, analogue Tachograph, long test, good condition

From £7,495 ***Finance from £25 p/w***

(03) 2003 LDV CONVOY FRONT ENTRY 16 SEAT MINICOACH TURBO

Features front entry lowered step, 16 highback coachseats, luggage racks, tinted panoramic windows, Euroliners, 1 owner, full history, Ford 2.4 Durotorque turbo diesel, reverse proximity warning, excellent condition

£10,995 ***Finance from £38 p/w***

(03) 2003 LDV CONVOY 16 SEAT POWER DOOR

Features front entry Power Door, 16 highback coachseats, 3 point belts, luggage racks, tinted panoramic windows, Euroliners, walnut dash, Duro torque 2.4 turbo diesel, good condition

£11,995 ***Finance from £40 p/w***

RENAULT

(51) 2001 LDV CONVOY LUX 16 SEATER

Featurers front entry lowered step, 16 highback moquette seats, 3 point belts, huge bonded panoramic tinted windows, luggage racks, show curtains, walnut dash kit, Euroliners, 73,000 miles, excellent condition

£8,995 ***Finance from £30 p/w***

(Y) 2001 LDV CONVOY FRONT ENTRY 16 SEATER COACH SPEC

Feature front entry lowered step,16 highback coach seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks, tinted panoramic windows, Ford di engine and gearbox, choice of 2.

From £7,995 ***Finance from £28 p/w***

(54) 2004 RENAULT MASTER 16 SEATER

Features side and front entry, 16 highback seats, 3 point all age belts, low floor easy access, excellent buy at only.

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(03) 2003 RENAULT MASTER LUXURY 16 SEATER

Features side entry lowered step,16 full size highback seats, 3 point belts, coach rear end with massive underfloor luggage boot, Analogue Tachograph, luggage racks, forced air and reading lights, walnut dash kit, excellent condition

£16,995 ***Finance from £59 p/w***

CITROEN

(51) 2002 CITROEN RELAY 1800HDI 14 SEATER

Features include: Side loading door, high back seats with three point seat belts, head rests, Radio/CD player and Class VI MoT.

£4,995 ***Finance from £19 p/w***

IVECO

(51) 2002 IVECO MILLENIUM 45-C14 LUXURY 16 SEATER

Features front entry lowered step, 16 full size highback coach seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks with forced air and reading lights, massive boot, tacho, tinted panoramic windows, show curtains sprung drivers seat, Euroliners, walnut dash, 1 owner, excellent value.

£15,995 ***Finance from £54 p/w***

(Y) 2001 IVECO 40 CII DAILY MWB 16 SEATER

Features front and side entry, 16 highback seats, 3 point belts, luggage racks, cd, a super buy.

Reduced to £9,995 ***Finance from £33 p/w***

(51) 2002 RENAULT MASTER 16 SEAT COACH

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Mercedes 412 1998, Various MOT's, 16 seats or 4 wheel-chairs, Sprinter, UVG wide body £6,500

3 x Optare Solo 2001, MOT October 08, 28 seats, Mercedes engine ~~£31,995~~ £29,995

3 Dennis Condor, 106 seats, with belts long MOT, G Reg. ~~£16,995~~ £15,495

Mercedes 814 1997, MOT June 08, 18 seats + 1 wheelchair, underfloor lift £4,995

2 Mercedes 614 2001, MOT June 08, 24 coach seats, electric door £11,995

2 Dennis Javelin 2002, MOT October 08, 48 seats, ex MoD, N registration £11,995

2 Mercedes 208D, 1999, long MOT 8, seats, £3,995

Mercedes 208 1998, MOT April 08, 11 seats, just painted, long MOT £4,995

Mercedes 308D 1998, MOT August 08, Underfloor lift £2,995

Mercedes 711 1997, MOT November 08, 12 seats but COIF for 24 seats £2,995

Mercedes 310 1999,MOT August 08, 6 seats, LWB £3,995

Mercedes 312, 1997, MOT May 08, 12 seats, LWB £2,995

Mercedes 612 1997, MOT Dec 08, 14 seats, full tracking, int lift, power doors, COIF £4,995

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2002 02 Reg fiesta combi, 1.4 Dci ,5 speed ,pas, gowerings conversion, Driver plus passenger and one wheel chair position,fold down ramp & electric winch Fitted with four point restraints, 13,000 miles from new.

2001 51 REG FIAT DUCATO

2001 51 Reg Fiat Ducato Maxi Hdi, 2.8 5 Speed ,pas, Lwb, Hi Roof, Euromotive Conversion Side Loading Door With Step, 12 High Back Seats, Tracking For Upto 4 W/ch, Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 15,460 Only Miles

02 REG CITROEN RELAY HDI 350

2.2 diesel ,5 speed ,pas, high roof, long wheel base, side loading door with step, 15 high back seats, unwin tracking,fitted with ratcliff underfloor tail lift, mint condition one owner, 31,500 miles only.

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Iveco 50.c15, 3.0hdi Td, 16 High Back Abacus Seats. Low Front Entry Slam Door, High Roof, tinted Windows, tested Flat Floor, Unwin Tracking, Ratcliff Underfloor Tail Lift,

2002 02 REG FORD TRANSIT

2002 02 Reg Ford Transit 350, 90bhp D, 2.4 Automatic Transmission ,pas, Lwb, Side Loading Door With Step, 8 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Good Condition 59,500 Miles.

X REG MERCEDES SPRINTER

X Reg Mercedes Sprinter 411cdi, 2.2cdi , Pas, Tiptronic ,pas, Lwb, Mellor Conversion Side Loading Entry Door With Fold Down Step, 10 Seats,plus 3 Wheelchair Positions, Unwin Tracking, Pls Underfloor Tail

2001 Y REG IVECO 45

2001 Y Reg Iveco 45.c11, 2.8 Td, Lwb High Roof, Euromotive Conversion, Low Front Entry Slam Door, , Unwin Tracking , 16 Restcroft Seats, Heater, Ratcliff Automatic Underfloor Tail Lift, 116,000 Kms, One Owner Ex Local Charity,

53 REG FIAT DUCATO

53 Reg Fiat Ducato 350 Hdi , 2.8 Diesel ,5 Speed ,pas, High Roof, Advance Conversion Lwb, Side Loading Door With Step, 12 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Tested Floor, Rolac Fold Out Ramp, Mint Condition, One Owner, 21,500 Miles Only.

2003 53 REG VAUXHALL MOVANO

Lm35 D, 2.5 ,5 Speed ,pas, Lwb, Minibus Options Conversion Side Loading Door With Fold Down Step, 10 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, Ex Local Authority

2002 52 REG RENAULT MASTER LM35 D

2.5,5 speed ,pas, lwb, o & h conversion. Side loading door with avs step, 16 high back seats, unwin tracking, air suspension, fitted with rear portaramp, mint condition one owner, 42,770 miles only.

54 REG PEUGEOT BOXER 350 HDI

54 Reg Peugeot Boxer 350 Hdi , 2.8 Diesel ,5 Speed ,pas, High Roof, Kirkham Conversion Lwb, Side Loading Door With Step, 12 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Ricon Tail Lift, Fitted With Bonded Tinted Windows, Mint Condition, One Owner, 55,500 Miles Only.

2004 53 REG RENAULT TRAFFIC

2004 53 Reg Renault Traffic Ll29 D, 2.2 ,5 Speed ,pas, Lwb, O & H Conversion Twin Side Loading Doors, N/s Door With Step, 5 High Back Seats + 1 W/chairs, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 60,500 Miles Only.

05 REG MERCEDES SPRINTER

05 Reg Mercedes Sprinter 208cdi , 2.2 Diesel ,automatic ,pas, Mwb, High Roof, Side Loading Door With Step, 8 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 14,000 Miles Only.

2005 05 REG VOLKSWAGEN

2005 05 Reg Volkswagen T5 Transporter, 2.5tdi, Automatic ,pas, Lwb,abs, High Roof, Side Loading Door With Step, 5 High Back Seats + 1 W/chairs, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 35,700 Miles Only.

1999 V REG, MERCEDES 814 VARIO

4.2 Td, Pas, Manual, Leicester Coachbuilt Body, Front Electric Door With Step, 16-24 Removable High Back Seats Unwin Tracking, Pls Under Floor Tail Lift, Ex Local Authority, Good Condition,

51 REG MERCEDES SPRINTER 208CDI

2.2 diesel ,5 speed ,pas, mwb, high roof, side loading door with step, 12 high back seats, unwin tracking, fitted with ratcliff underfloor tail lift, mint condition one owner, 10,000 miles only.

2003 03 REG RENAULT MASTER

2003 03 Reg Renault Master Mm35 D, 2.2 ,5 Speed ,pas, Mwb, Warner Bus Conversion Sld With Step, Driver Protect Screen, 5 High Back Seats + 2 W/chairs, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Good Condition One Owner, 48,500 Miles Only.

2004 54 REG RENAULT MASTER

2004 54 Reg Renault Master Lm39 D, 2.5 ,5 Speed ,pas, Lwb, Mellor Conversion Side Loading Door With Avs Step, 14 High Back Seats, Unwin Tracking, Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 47,500 Miles Only.

2003 52 REG MERCEDES SPRINTER

2003 52 Reg Mercedes Sprinter 413cdi , 2.2 ,5 Speed ,pas, Lwb, Jakab Conversion Side Loading Door , Unwin Tracking, Rugged Easy Load Sretcher, Piped Oxygen, Fitted With Rear Door/ramp, Nice Spec, One Owner, Choice Of 4,

2003 03 REG RENAULT MASTER

2003 03 Reg Renault Master Sm33 D, 2.2 ,5 Speed ,pas, Swb, O & H Conversion Side Loading Door With Step, 5 High Back Seats + 2 W/chairs Positions, Unwin Tracking, Fitted With Ricon Tail Lift, Mint Condition One Owner, 48,080 Miles Only.

Y REG MERCEDES SPRINTER

411Cdi, PAS, Air Susp, Mobile Office / Communications Unit, Separate Kitchin Fitted With Microwave,sink & Fridge, Air Con And Heating, Silent Generator, Roof Entry With S/ Rails, Air T/scopic Mast, side Door With Steps, Storage Lockers, One Owner

M REG, MERCEDES 709,

M Reg, Mercedes 709, PAS, Mellor Coachbuilt Body, 24 Seats Fitted With Seat Belts, front Electric Door, Unwin Tracking, Ricon Underfloor Tail Lift, Ex Local Authority, Good Condition,

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2003 53 Reg Mercedes 413cdi, 2.2td, Tiptronic (Manual Or Auto) Frank Guy Conversion, Electric Power Operated Peters Door, 16 High Back Seat's With 3pt Seat Belts, Full Climate Control, One Owner Ex Charity,

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Alexander bodies, ZF gearboxes, 40 seats, superb condition.

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Cummins/Allison, East Lancs bodies, 40 seats, new MOTs.

1998/9 R/S REG DENNIS DART SLF'S,
Cummins/Allison with trap fitted, Marshall bodies, 31/37 seats.

1994 L REG DENNIS DARTS, CUMMINS/ALLISON
Plaxton Pointer bodies, 40 seats.

1996/7 P REG DENNIS DARTS
Cummins/Allison, Plaxton Pointer bodies, 40 seats.
£6000 as they are or £10000 with a new MOT, re-trimmed and re-painted one colour

1991/2 J REG LEYLAND OLYMPIANS Cummins L10 engines, Alexander bodies, ZF automatic gearboxes, 85 seats (yes 85!!), New tyres, Repainted white, converted to single door

1995 M REG SCANIA L113
Voith gearbox, Northern Counties Paladin body, 49 seats.

1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
Volvo engines/ZF auto's , East Lancs bodies 83 seats, good tests.

1995/6 N REG DENNIS DART,
Cummins/Allison, 40 seats, Northern Counties body , new trim, very tidy.

1995 M/N REG VOLVO B10B'S,
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1997 P REG VOLVO B6BLE'S,
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1998 (PP) Dennis Transliner. 49 good seats, air conditioning, to be sold with new MOT and LEZ COMPLIANT. **£38,000 + VAT.**

1995 (M) Scania K113 Van Hool Alizee T8. 49 / 53 retrimmed seats (approximately 2 years ago). Currently has 53 seats but all WC parts present, recent Scania fitted clutch, comfort shift gearbox, new paint respray by Volvo at Loughborough. Looks and drives well. December 2008 MOT. **£39,000 + VAT.**

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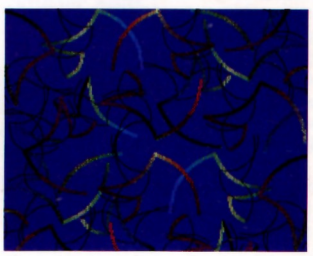

1995 (M) Bova Futura Club (Low Height). 53 seats, Cummins engine, brand new Duoflex retrim this week in modern blue Holdsworth moquette, ZF 6-speed gearbox. MOT March 2009. **£22,500 + VAT.**

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COACHES

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Volvo Vanhool Triaxle 1999 49 Seats, Belts, Toilet, Air Con, Tested 2009 £80000.00 no p/x
Scania Vanhool 2001 49 + Driver, Toilet, Allison Auto, Belts, Air Con, Full Luxury £105000.00
Beulas Stergo 2001 51 + Toilet, Air Con, ZF, Low Mileage, 225k ONLY £95000.00
Ayat 2001 53 Recliners, Toilet, ZF Auto, 315K
Marco Polo 1998 69 Coach Seats, Cummins
Bova 1994 70 + Driver Highback Seats, Tested 09, TV & Video
Ayat 2001 73 Recliners, ZF Semi Auto, Toilet, Twin Scair, 350K
Neoplan Skyliner 1992 with New Merc V8 Twin Turbo, 79 Retrimmed Seats, ZF, Tested Feb 2009
Volvo Plaxton Premier 1997 53 Recliners, Toilet, ZF Auto
Javelin 1990 57 Seat, Manual, Cummins Engine
Leyland Tiger 1992 53 Seat, Manual ZF, Cummins Engine, 12m
Scania Vanhool 1996 51 + Toilet, Manual also 2001 51 + Toilet, Auto
Iveco Paragon 2002 49 Seat Executive, ZF Gearbox all Extra's
Neoplan Transliner 1998 49 + Toilet, Air Con
Volvo Plaxton Premier 1995 49 Seat, Toilet, Manual - *Choice of 4 Premiers all ages*
Volvo Jonckheere 1994 / 1996 49 + Toilet, DVD, Choice 1996
Beulas Stergo 1998/99 49 + Toilet, Air Con, ZF, Low Mileage
Setra 1992 49 Seat, Toilet, Manual, 12m
Plaxton Premier 1998 48 Recliners, Toilet, Air Con, TV & DVD, ZF
Volvo Premier Plaxton 1998 46/48 St Air Con
Volvo B12 Caetano Enigma Exec I Shift, Auto
Mercedes Touro 2005 / 2004 Exec, 49/53 Seat
Mercedes Hispano 2001 49 Recliners, ZF Auto, Merc Engine, Air Con, Toilet, Fridge, Low Mileage
Enigma MAN - Midi 2007 Air Con, 39 Recliners, Only 38K
Javelin 2002 36 Seats, Belts, Tested Aug 08, 8.5m
Volvo B6 Algarve 1997 34 Recliners, Belts, Tidy
850 Club 2003 35 Recliners, Air Con, TV & Video, Cummins 79 K
Cheetah New & Used Model 33 Seats choice of 6
Mercedes Medio 2006 29 Recliners, Belts, Air Con, UNDER 7K
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New Model Cheetah - Choice of 3

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CAETANO ENIGMA

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2005 Executive 49/53 Seat, Only 285K, 6 Speed - *In Stock* - **also**

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1998 46 / 48 Highback Seats, Belts, 6 Speed, Rear Toilet, Full Luxury, Air Con, Fridge, TV, DVD Player Also Choice of 1997 B6 34 Seat / 1994 Jonckheere 49 Seat 1996 Jonckheere 49 Seat / 1993 Premier 51 Seat / 1995 49 Seat / 1997 Premier 53 Seat / 1999 Triaxle 49 Seat

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33 Seats, 3 Point Belts, Luggage Racks, Manual or Auto, Air Con optional, Reading Lights, Double Glazing, Forced Air, Tinted Glass, Arm Rests, Curtains, Boot, PA, Digital Tacho

AYAT DOUBLE DECK

2001 - Reg. No. MI PCV

73 Recliners, Belts, Semi Auto ZF, Middle Toilet, Air Con, Tables, TV & Video Fridge, Hot Water Boiler

Superb

Mercedes Wheelchair Specification

New and Used **Vito** 8 + Driver, Wheelchair Ramp
2001 ***411D*** 16 Seat, Lift, Tacho, Luxury
1996 ***609D*** 24 + 6 Wheelchair's + 12 Passengers Rear PLS Lift, Tested
2000 ***614D*** 16 / 6 Wheelchair's Telma, PSL Lift
1991 ***709D*** 23 or 15 / 3 Wheelchair's, Lift **OFFERS**
2006 ***814D*** 32 or 2 + 10 Wheelchair's, Auto
New ***813D*** Plaxton 32 or 2 + 11, Manual or Auto, Euro 4, Rear PLS Lift - Choice
Pre Reg ***Primo*** 28 +14 Standing or 27 + 16 or 25 + 13 + 1 Wheelchair, Cummins

Mercedes Service Specification

2007 ***616D*** Mercedes 25+3+1 Wheelchair, SLF
Pre Reg ***813D*** Plaxton 31 Seats, Side Lift
New ***813D*** Plaxton 31 Seats, Side Lift, Auto
1993 ***709D*** Plaxton 25+10 Seats, Tested 08
1994 ***709D*** Alexander 25+8 Seats
1995/96 ***709D*** Plaxton 27+7 Seats, Tested
1995 ***811D*** Plaxton 27 Seat
1997 ***814D*** Alexander 27+8 Seat
1998 ***814D*** Alexander 27+8 Seat, Auto
1998 ***814D*** Marshall 27+8 Seat, Belts
1998 ***814D*** Plaxton 27+12 Seat, Telma
1998 ***814D*** Mellor 29+6 Seat, Choice
1998 ***814D*** Plaxton 31+8 Seat, Auto

Mercedes Coach Specification

New ***816D*** 33 Seat, Digital Tacho, Luxury - Choice of 5
2003 ***814D*** 33 Seat, Mellor, Tested 2009
2003 ***814D*** 33 Seat, Mellor, Luxury
2000 ***814D*** 33 Seat, Belts, Cheetah
2000 ***814D*** 33 Seat, Cheetah, Tested
1996 ***814D*** 33 Seat, TV & Video
1993 ***814D*** 33 Seat, Luxury
1999 ***814D*** 29 Seat, Cheetah, Boot
2006 ***Medio*** 29 Seat, Air Con, Full Luxury
1999 ***814D*** 25 Seat, Jumbo Size Boot
1999 ***814D Full Exec.*** 4 Leather Seats, Tables, Air Con
1996 ***711D*** Turbo, 25 Seat, Long Body
New ***813D*** Euro 4 Digital Tacho, 24 Seat, Power Door
2006 ***814D*** 24 Seat, Full Luxury, Power Door, Choice
1997 ***611D / 612D*** 24 Coach Seat, Boot
1996 ***711D*** 24 Seat, Boot, Turbo, Tested
1996 ***711D*** 24 Seat, Power Door, Boot
1998 ***814D*** 23+8 Upgraded Seat, New Telma
2007 ***515D*** 16 Seat, Air Con, Under 10m
New ***515D*** 16 Seat, Air Con, all extras
New ***311D*** 16 Seat, Luggage Racks, Luxury *SPECIAL PRICE*
2001 ***Vito 108*** 6 + Driver, Belts, Tested
1999 ***Vito 110*** 6 + Driver, Auto, Tested
2004 ***Vito 110*** 7 + Driver, Auto, Air Con
2007 ***Vito 111*** Extra Long, 8 + Driver, Air Con
2007 ***Vito 120*** E/Long, 7 + Driver (Leatherette), Air Con
New ***Vito 111*** Extra Long 8 + Driver

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Dennis Darts 2002 8.5m 29 Seats

Optare Solo Mercedes 2001, 30 Service Seats, Allison Auto, Low Mileage

Neoplan Service SLF 11.6m, 45 Seat + 26, Neoplan Cummins ZF, Low Mileage

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Plaxton Primo

New 28 + 14, W/C Ramp, Telma, Power Door, Auto, Cummins

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LEYLAND TIGER 1992 53 Seat, 6 Speed ZF, Cummins, Tested 2008
SCANIA 1990 Alexander, ZF Auto
ALEXANDER ZF Auto, Cummins, all Alloy, 47+21 Seats, Split Step, Choice

MERCEDES 814D DDA

2003 31 Coach Seats, Front Side and Rear Destination, Diptac Poles, 5 Speed Gearbox

Other Dual Purpose Stock Available

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1994 **711D** Marshal 29 Seat
Pre Reg **814D** Beaver III 33 Seats, Auto - Choice of 2

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Leyland Olympian 12/89 74+16 Seats, Auto, Gardener Engine
Metroliner Open Top 79 Seat £ 2000.00
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Volvo Alexander 1990 82 Seats, Auto

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New But Reg'd Dec 2007 16 Highback Seats, Panoramic Windows, Reading Lights, Forced Air, Front Entry, Belts

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KIA
2004 **Pregio** 12 Seat, Air Con
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2004 (04) reg Mercedes 413 CDi Optare Soroco. 16 reclining seats, power door, air conditioning and large boot.

1996 (P) Mercedes 814D. 33 high-back seats, 3 point belts, power door, very low mileage.

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Contact: Steve Peach Mobile: 07836 551020

Mercedes-Benz

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1999 MERCEDES 814D VARIO
Automatic 27 seats with seatbelts, Alexander body, **MOT April 2009. April 2009.**
Price: ***£12,500 ono***
CHOICE OF 2

1996 MERCEDES 814L
Buscraft body, 35 seats with seatbelts, air suspension, **MOT September 2008.**
Price: ***£18,500 ono***

1995 MERCEDES 711 PLAXTON BEAVER
29 seats with seatbelts. **MOT'd until March 2009.**
Price: ***£5,000 ono***

1995 MERCEDES 1416
Wright body, automatic, 47 seats. Price: ***£17,500***
CHOICE OF 2 MOT July 2008 and MOT November 2008.

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24 seats with 3 point belts, power door and **MOT'd until September 2008.**
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~~***£82,000***~~ ***reduced to £79,000 ono***

1998 Iveco Eurorider, Beulas Stergo E
49 reclining seats, Centre WC & Continental door, Water boiler etc, DVD, Twin Screens, PA, Air Con, Excellent interior & exterior condition, Manual Gearbox. ~~***£48,000***~~ ***reduced to £42,000 ono***

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SETRA 415 HD (Reg August 2004) - £145,000

MILEAGE: 255Ks MOT: APRIL 2009, ZF Tiptronic Gearbox, 49 + 1 Seats, 2 x Foldown monitors, DVD/CD Player, GPS Navigation, Air Conditioning/Climate Control, PA System, Seat-belts, Arm-rests & Foot Rests, Folding tables on seat backs, Drinks holders, Toilet/ Washroom facilities, Fridge, Hot & Cold Drink Facilities

Choice of 2

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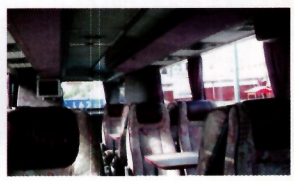

MILEAGE: 420Ks MOT: JUNE 2009, 4 OVER 4 Gearbox, 32 + 2 Seats with 8Tables, 2 x monitors, DVD/CD Player, Air Conditioning, PA System, Seat-belts, Arm-rests & Foot Rests, Toilet/Washroom Facilities, Fridge, Hot & Cold Drinks Facilities, Full Rear Servery:- Microwave, large sink & fridge, Separate Generator

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(53) 2004 Ford Transit 12 seat minibus 2.4 diesel, twin side loading doors, high back seats in white 50,000 miles ***£8,750***

01 (51) Ford Transit 2.4 Tdi 15 seat with tacho tow bar ***£7,495***

(55) 2006 Ford Transit 9 seat GLX twin side doors rear tail gate 50,000 miles ***£4,995***

SOLD

S (99) Ford Transit 9 seat minibus 2.5 diesel, five speed high back seats with three point belts ***£2750***

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(57) 2007 pre-registered LDV Maxus 12 seat minibus. Features: 2.5tdi 75ps, high back seats with three point seat belts,side loading door. Dilvery mileage only ***£13,795***

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(54) 2004 Peugeot Boxer 17 seat mini-bus 2.8 Turbo diesel, high back seats, four rear seats on tracking, 29,700 miles ***£12,995***

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(P) 1996 Mercedes 814 semi Automatic 32 seat minibus tracking for 10 wheelchairs external lift ,high back seats, Front entry drop step , two sky lights rear heating, mileage from 125km **COIF/PSV** ***£7,995***

(02) 2002 Renault Master 10 seat mini-bus tracking for two wheelchairs inboard lift rear heating 71,000 miles ***£8,995***

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(56) LDV Maxus 2.5 diesel 12 seat minibus inboard Ricon lift tracking x 2 wheelchairs 10,000 miles ***£14,450***

(Y) 2001 Volkswagen Transporter T4 1.9 diesel four seats plus tracking to take two wheelchairs light weight fold out ramp electric reals 28000 miles ***£6,995***

(52) 2002 Renault Master Rohill 16 seat minibus 2.8 turbo diesel, fully tracked floor, lowering suspension,front entry power door rear heating, high back seats ***£10,995***

(02) 2002 Mercedes Sprinter 208 Cdi MWB 2.2 diesel minibus Features include, power steering, inboard ricon tail lift, tracking for three wheelchairs, ***£7,995***

(S) 1998 Ford Iveco 49-10 Front entry drop step with power door,16 seat high back seats, tracking to take five wheelchairs,in board Ricon tail lift, ***£5,995***

(X) 2000 Renault Master LWB 2.5 diesel minibus tracking three wheelchairs, inboard lift ***£6995***

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Office Diary

From Gareth Evans' newsdesk

MONDAY:
Press day. Show my colleagues the latest additions to my 'filth files' from the weekend (a running joke) - aka my pics. Cambridgeshire & Lincolnshire has much to offer if you're into artistic/landscape views - even for someone like me who's been spoilt in that sense, having been brought up in rural mid-Wales. A contact calls and comments on the laughter in the *CBW* office: "That's normal," I tell him unashamedly. Leave at 2200hrs.

TUESDAY:
A lunchtime start. Try with little success to call various contacts and make plans for the week ahead - everyone's busy it seems.

WEDNESDAY:
Spend the morning in the office. A press release lands in my inbox, saying that *xxx* organisation has found that coffee is the new trendy drink. Duly tell my colleagues, to which Martin replies: "They've got something wrong haven't they - they've not included your cheesy grin mugshot with it!" After lunch hit the road to Birmingham to visit Birmingham International/Claribels. All three brothers, Nigel, Matthew and Andy are present, who I must admit, I regard as friends in addition to being industry contacts. Decide the arrival of the new Magiq is a good way to lead into a profile. Head to parents' home on the Welsh border.

THURSDAY: Visit Silver Star in Caernarfon and get the usual warm welcome. Elfyn Thomas, MD, while clearly up to his eyes, recalls tales from the company's past in addition to giving me the rundown on current matters. The intended visit to a couple of operators on Anglesey can't happen as they're busy, so decide to put names to faces at two operators on the Lleyn peninsula, Berwyn and Clynnog & Trefor. Both comment favourably on *CBW* and mention how 'Last Stop' always makes them laugh. Having driven 200 miles, arrive 'back home'. Catch up with my good friends and former work colleagues Trystan & Phil in the evening over a pint.

FRIDAY:
Spend the day writing up material and sorting piles of photographs from the past week.

Mr Barclay finds himself quids in at Bridgend bus station

Bingo!

This picture was sent in by Barclay Davies, officer for Wales at Bus Users UK.

"Whilst running a bus users surgery in Bridgend bus station, I saw that a service to Castle Bingo has the service number £££ displayed on the departures board and thought it might be something for *CBW*'s Last Stop," he said.

However, we couldn't help wondering in the *CBW* office whether Barclay got 'pounded' by complaints from passengers? If not, he's a lucky man - indeed, we guess you could say he's 'quids in'!

A personal service

Customers calling Leicester Skylink's new timetable helpline got more 'help' than they had bargained for, writes *CBW* regular Roger Bushby.

People calling the number were greeted with the message... "For gay, press one, for straight, press two!"

Hundreds of leaflets printed for Arriva have had to be re-called in a hurry from tourist offices and bus stations when bewildered travellers found themselves connected to a sex chat line instead of finding out what time their bus arrived at East Midlands Airport.

When the complaints started to flood-in, the company dispatched employees to take the leaflets to be pulped, with Arriva explaining that the unnamed printers had unfortunately transposed some phone numbers.

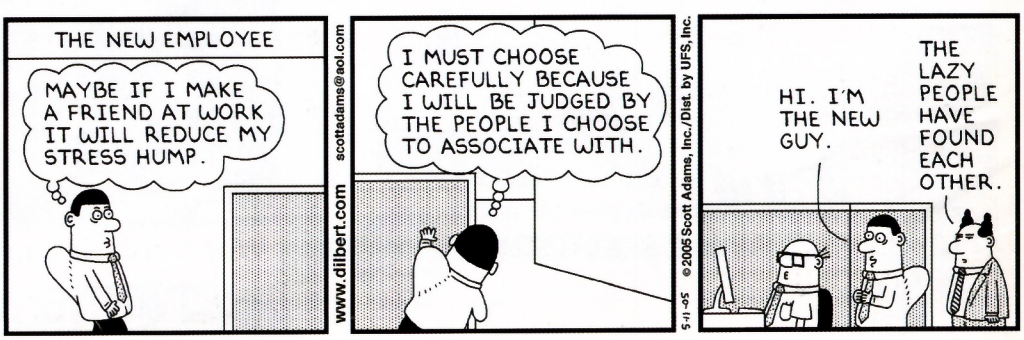
Said one traveller, who was enquiring about a bus to meet her from her holiday in Greece: "You don't expect to ring a timetable helpline and 'straight' away be asked about your sexual orientation!"

A plane pic ...or is it?

Is this a plane pic? On the face of it yes, in more ways than one.. However, look more closely, and you'll notice that the aircraft has in fact been 'cleverly' shot as a reflection in the window of a Birmingham International Coaches' Bova Futura, whose depot lies under the flight path to BHX... Oh dear, we groaned in the *CBW* office when we were shown this - another one of Gareth's 'arty farty' pics...!

Another one for Gareth's collection. Also his screensaver (probably)

Dilbert



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Mike Whitehead, Managing Director, Distinctive Systems Ltd

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Dear Charlotte

I wanted to take the time to thank you for your prompt attention at the last minute to ensure our advert was placed in **CBW**.

The advert has been a great success as we have already received fourteen enquiries over two days, with many businesses committing to using our service.

You did promise me that **CBW** would be a good target audience for our Driving Licence Checking Service and you have been proved right!

Once again many thanks and we will continue to work with **CBW** in the future to ensure your readers are aware of the benefits of our service. Best regards

David Blockley, Head of Sales and Marketing Verifi, Driving Licence Checking www.verifi.info

Andy

The Legislation guide received with our **CBW** this week looks very useful and I would like to give copies to our senior managers as well as those who get one by having their copy of **CBW** anyway. Is there any chance of getting another, say, 10 copies?

Peter Shipp, EYMS

Hi Andy

I found your recent booklet "**CBW** essential guide to legislation" very interesting and wondered if you had any spare copies available for purchase?

Best regards

Des Rogers, FCILT
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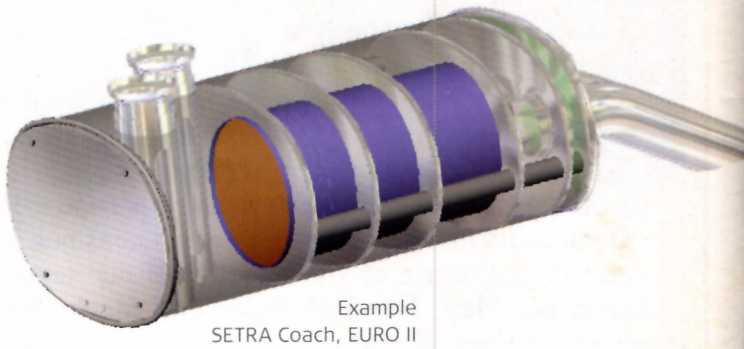

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